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EU and Bulgaria: An exploration on policy non-participation perception

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Abstract

This research paper aims to identify whether Bulgarian citizens have an interest in the policies of the European Union in which Bulgaria is not a participant, namely the introduction of the Euro and the expansion of the Schengen Zone, and to uncover what the perceptions regarding the country's non-participation are. The main research question this thesis attempts to answer is *What are the associations and opinions Bulgarian citizens have regarding Bulgaria's non-participation from the Eurozone and the Schengen Area?* Benchmark theory is the leading theoretical framework from which the thesis operates. The research methodology relates to exploratory, idiographic case study research and includes the usage of in-depth interviews for obtaining data while snowball sampling is used to gather more participants. For data coding and analysis, Atlas.TI.23 is used. The results of the analysis are ambiguous considering only one third of respondents wish to be part of the Euro and Schengen. What was found however is that besides the initially theorised factors, economic evaluations, identity and national political concerns, two more factors were also found, These are EU related concerns and news viewership. As it currently stands, it remains to be seen how future developments in regards to these two policies will affect Bulgaria and its citizens.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background and State of the Art

There are a total of twenty European Member States that use the Euro as their currency and twenty-six States that are part of the Schengen zone, four of which are not part of the European Union (EU). Bulgaria is one of the Member States which has not adopted the Euro as its official currency. Bulgaria also does not feature among the Member States which are part of the Schengen Zone. There have, however, been attempts to become part of these two EU policies, but those have failed to be successful at this point in time. The most recent attempt to secure a place in the Eurozone, on the 1st of January 2024, was scrapped as the necessary legislation was not yet accepted by a ruling national government. However, a new date has been set for the entry of the Euro within the country's financial system, the 1st of January 2025. There has also been a national referendum held by the pro-Russian party Revival (Възраждане) about the postponement of the introduction of the Euro for twenty years which claims to have collected 200,000 signatures (Euractiv, 2023), which goes to show the controversial nature this particular EU policy, the Euro, has within the state of Bulgaria. This is further illustrated by Bulgarians' scepticism regarding the introduction of this policy due to inflation in the past three years as the conflict between the Russian Federation and Ukraine escalated to the extent it affected the global market economy for certain goods. As such, according to Eurobarometer (2023), the most salient issues which Bulgarians face are rising prices, inflation and the general cost of living, as well as the national economic situation, with 60% and 31% of respondents agreeing with these issues, respectively. Furthermore, Bulgarians judge the current situation of the national economy in a very negative manner, with 79% responding that the situation is "bad", compared with the European average of 58% (Spring Eurobarometer, 2023). However, when it comes to transnational monetary and economic policies, particularly the one regarding the introduction of the Euro, only 40% of respondents have stated that they are supportive of this policy. In comparison, 46% have stated that they are against it.

Meanwhile, it appears that becoming a part of the Schengen Zone is a secondary concern that citizens are not as interested in as they are with the monetary policy in question. Bulgaria, along with Romania, were unable to sign the Schengen Treaty in 2022, thus not entering the agreement, due to border security control, unauthorised migration and corruption concerns from Austria (Deutsche Welle, 2022). However, there was a new bid for entry into the visa-free zone in the month of December of 2023, in which Bulgaria may be permitted to join as long as there is no opposition. In light of events, Bulgaria is undergoing a change in regard to the Schengen agreement. Bulgaria will become part of the agreement by sea and air in March of 2024 under the conditions posited by Austria's Interior Minister Gerhard Karner. These conditions state that there will be an increase in Frontex officers along the Bulgarian-Turkish border on Bulgaria's side and the Romania-Serbia border on Romania's side and that more European Union funds will be allocated to protect these borders from migrant surges (Jones, 2023). Alongside this, the European Commission is going to provide support to protect the EU's external borders with Turkey and Serbia (Jones, 2023). These conditions, however, appear vague and limited in substance in media outlets as well as official statements regarding this issue at this point in time. A news report from Schengen Visa News written by Arta Desku (2023) and ETIAS (2023) cover the conditions posited by Austria more substantially. More specifically, they mention that the number of Frontex staff members triples with financial support provided by the European Commission for frontier protection, which would result in the reinforced monitoring along the Turkish border. Also, enhanced border surveillance measures will be placed at the borders between Romania and Bulgaria and between Hungary, Serbia and Romania. Furthermore, Austrian document advisers will be sent to collaborate with Romanian and Bulgarian airports for assistance in the verification of passenger identities and travel documents ahead of the proposed lifting of air travel restrictions. And last, is the relocation or reception of asylum seekers of Syrian and Afghani origin within the two countries waiting for accession within the Schengen zone, about which ETIAS writes "This demand reflects Austrian efforts to shift responsibility elsewhere". Whether Bulgaria will be

allowed to enter the Schengen accord through land will remain to be seen in future negotiations later in 2024.

It would be deemed necessary to also mention the political context in which this study is set, particularly so in terms of national trust. Instability and political crisis have been a main feature of the political arena of Bulgaria for some time, as there have been five elections in the past three years in which no consensus could be arrived at in terms of who to govern the country. As such, there have been multiple temporary, caretaker governments which do not stay for long periods of time and as such are unable to move forward with the country's political development in the international arena that represents the European Union. In the public's eye, this is concerning, as their freedoms and livelihoods may be drastically affected by the changes at the national level that the aforementioned policies bring. As such, it was concluded that Bulgarians have more trust in European institutions than the national ones. The Eurobarometer (2023) data shows there is little trust in the national government, compared to the average within the Union, 14% and 32%, respectively. The same can be said about the Bulgarian national parliament and the Union average, standing at 13% and 33%, respectively. Meanwhile, trust in the European Union in general is set to 48% with 37% of respondents stating that they distrust the Union. However, the majority of respondents are in support of the European Union, with 50% stating that the EU conjures a positive image, with 30% remaining neutral on the topic (Spring Eurobarometer, 2023). It appears that Bulgarians consider the European Union as a lifeline when the government is ineffectual and the economy stagnant.

1.2. Knowledge Gap and Research Questions

Generally, there appears to be little interest in Bulgaria in terms of public opinion research, despite being a Central Eastern European (CEE) country with a tenure in the EU of approximately seventeen years. A few reasons that may explain this is the lack of interest and trust of the citizens towards research in general, and in particular social research, thus refusing to participate altogether. This can pose a problem of representation where only a particular group or groups within the population are involved in research, thus producing biased results. Another problem is the language barrier that foreign social scientists may find more prevalent among older generations and citizens with lower education.

While there have been studies conducted focusing on public opinion and the factors which influence them in CEE states (Boomgardien, Schuck, & de Vreese, 2011; Vetik, Nimmerfelft, Taru, 2006), there don't appear to be many studies which look into this from a Bulgarian perspective besides the Eurobarometer. Meanwhile, there are a few other studies which focus on the impact of European integration in Bulgaria and Romania (Dimitrova, 2021; Surubaru & Nitoiu, 2021), but do not look into public opinion whatsoever. Furthermore, there has been little qualitative research on the topic of Euroscepticism, and even less so on the CEE country of Bulgaria, as mentioned previously. Besides, a meta-analysis conducted by Vasilopoulou (2018) reveals that studies on Euroscepticism have been predominantly quantitative, which is also the reason why a qualitative research approach was chosen for this research endeavour, as it aims to discover citizens' perceptions and the underlying reasons for those perceptions.

Therefore, this bachelor thesis aims to explore the different perceptions Bulgarians have regarding their exclusion from the Euro and the Schengen Zone and to identify whether they agree or disagree with the continued expansion of integration of European Union policies in Bulgaria. Thus, the main research question is *What are the associations and opinions Bulgarian citizens have regarding Bulgaria's non-participation from the Eurozone and the Schengen Area?*

This question will be answered by addressing the sub-research questions below.

1. What are the interviewees' stances on their exclusion from the Euro and the Schengen zone?
2. What factors do Bulgarians cite explaining their position on the issue?

In the following sections are discussed the theoretical framework used to guide this research, the methodology used for the analysis of the interviews, the results from the analysis, the discussion and conclusion where recommendations for further research and an overview of the results is provided.

2. Theory

There are several ways in which public opinion has been viewed in research. One of the ways in which public opinion is viewed is a rational, information-based phenomenon which positions the best ideas at the top of the public agenda (Glynn & Huye, 2008). Another view of public opinion theories that it is a form of social control, which is subjected by mass media upon the general masses (Glynn & Huye, 2008). More specifically, the public opinion as a form of control theory posits that citizens are led to consider political views only in the way in which television and newspapers see fit (Glynn & Huye, 2008). This is an interesting take on public opinion formation, as it leaves the “forming” process at the hands of the media. Here, then enter the elements of trust and objectivity in the media. Is the media trustworthy? Is it able to convey news objectively? While both of these approaches offer interesting insights, they do not necessarily explain the bigger role which public opinion has been playing in the recent decades as citizens have become increasingly involved in politics. Public opinion is largely impacted by the availability of information regarding issues concerning the citizens, even more so those on the EU level. In fact, opinion towards the EU is at the centre of debates in regards to the current state of affairs and future integration of the EU, for which citizen support is acknowledged to be a key factor (Boomgaarden, Schuck, & de Vreese, 2011). Considering the importance of public opinion in EU related affairs, it would be of great interest to find what are these opinions in a Central Eastern European country, such as Bulgaria, and which factors have influence over these opinions. As such, the following section introduces the core theoretical framework this research uses to guide the analysis of the findings. The framework in question is the Benchmark theory devised by de Vries (2018).

2.1. Benchmark Theory as Theoretical Framework

As stated above, Benchmark theory was chosen as the theoretical framework to guide this research. As per the theory of de Vries (2018), it posits that the public weigh their perceived benefits received from the status quo against those associated with an alternative state. In the case of EU integration, it follows that citizens weigh the perceived benefits of their country being part of the EU against those from being outside the EU. The theory further differentiates between regime and policy evaluations, and thus draws upon Easton’s (1975) framework of political support (De Vries, 2018). His framework includes two types of support, diffuse and specific support. Diffuse support, on the other hand, focuses on the evaluation of the regime, or the system of government and judicial underpinnings in essence. Specific support relates to the evaluation of policies or, in other words, the binding collective decisions undertaken by the political actors within a government. To specify further on the types of support, de Vries (2018) builds upon the distinctions between the types of evaluations by Robert Dahl from their work “On Democracy”. As mentioned earlier, there are two types of evaluations, regime and policy. Regime evaluations relate to the public assessment of how the rules and procedures laid down in the treaties and the Constitution work and the process in which public goods are delivered in the future (De Vries, 2018). Meanwhile, policy evaluations refer, more specifically, to citizens’ perceptions of the degree in which a system of government delivers the public good preferred by them (De Vries, 2018). Another theory which is used in conjunction with benchmark theory is that of prospect. It posits that decisions are made based on the potential value of losses and gains, which are dependent on benchmarks (De Vries, 2018). These benchmarks could be immigration issues, national economic performance, or others. However, due to the presence of uncertainty brought by the lack of knowledge of what the future may bring politically, it has been argued that people would prefer the already known existing benefits over those which may be brought upon in the future, thus preferring the status quo (De Vries, 2018).

While this may serve as an efficient method for studying public opinion on the national level, the same cannot necessarily be said about the transnational level. This is the case because it is difficult to untangle the inner workings of the EU as it is a multilevel political system which is in constant state of flux as new developments within the integration process occur. Such developments could be considered the entering of new Member States into the EU or the integration of current Member States in transnational policies such as Schengen and the Eurozone. Moreover, it has been theorised that it

would be difficult to differentiate between regime and policy evaluations on the EU level considering that EU policies require a transfer of sovereignty from national government to the EU, thus creating a complex and multilevel division of power between EU institutions and national governments (De Vries, 2018). In this regard, where does the influence of the national government end and that of the EU start? Another reason why it would be difficult for the public to assess the regime or the policy of the EU lies in the access of information regarding these types of developments and how the EU operates in general. One of the factors which influence this is the lack of a supranational public sphere in which debates take place, which can leave citizens unsure about the different aspects which the process of integration entails (De Vries, 2018). Furthermore, public opinion theories posit that national political representatives and particularly, party members, are used as proxies for information and therefore opinion formation (Boomgaarden et al., 2011; Anderson, 1998). However, the issue with this particular approach to information seeking can lead to the public only adhering to the opinion of a party or even single political actors, who only reiterate their affiliation's or personal stances regarding the EU. This would create an echo chamber that reverberates and recycles these stances. In this regard, can politicians be trusted to inform their citizens objectively about the progress in EU integration within their state? However, an even more interesting question would be what happens when the public does not stay informed in any way regarding the EU? The answer to this would be that those that do not seek to be informed about the EU and its workings don't form an opinion at all. But would this really be the case?

Having laid out the foundation on which this research stands, it would be beneficial to explore how the theory of Benchmarking relates to this study. First, this study focuses on policy support and evaluation rather than that of the regime. Furthermore, the view of this case is different from what the Benchmark theory posits in that the reversal of the status quo and the alternative state is at play. In other words, this research paper posits that the status quo is the non-participation of a state, namely Bulgaria, from the EU policies of Schengen and the Euro, as it currently stands, while the alternative state is the one in which Bulgaria is part of both policies. Despite looking into the regime evaluation of the EU being of considerable interest, the study focuses on these two particular policies as they are the ones which are currently being negotiated. Do citizens perceive it as a loss not being part of one or both policies, or do they perceive it as something positive? How do citizens measure the two states against each other? In light of this theory, a tentative question is whether the benefits of not being part of the policies outweigh the benefits of being part of the policies according to the citizens.

2.2. Influencing Factors

Both Euroscepticism and EU support are influenced by different factors. This has been established in the section above, which concerns the Benchmark theory and in particular the "benchmarks" used in order to evaluate the regime and its policies. Thus, here it is posited that these benchmarks are in fact the influencing factors which have an effect on these evaluations and therefore attitudes towards the EU. Considering this, it appears that EU attitudes are multifaceted, and it would be ill-advised to perceive that they can be positioned on a single dimension, that is EU support or Euroscepticism. Furthermore, it has been suggested that people may like and dislike the EU at the same time (De Vries, 2018). This certainly brings Easton's framework of specific and diffuse support. From this it can be inferred that individuals may find that the regime (diffuse support) appeals to them as a system (the EU) but do not necessarily agree with the policies (specific support) it has to offer. The alternative could also be the case where the public agrees with the policies of the regime but not the regime itself. The more interesting question, however, is what these influencing factors are? Research conducted by Boomgaarden et al. (2011) looks into the more prominent factors or antecedents which influence EU opinions, which have been in the centre of attention in recent years. These are economic evaluations, national politics as proxies, national identity considerations and anti-immigration. These factors have a varying degree of influence. Furthermore, not all these factors are necessarily present in different countries. Some of them may have a more prominent effect, while others may have a less prominent effect on attitudes.

The first factor, economic evaluations, Boomgaarden et al. (2011) posit that citizens who are well-educated, have skills or have higher income are more likely to benefit from further EU

integration. On another note, Rohrschneider (2006) posits that when the public makes decisions about economic policy, it is based on past economic conditions. They theorise that when citizens evaluate economies in a positive manner, the idea of EU integration becomes more appealing than if the public were to perceive the current economic condition of the state in a negative light. Furthermore, Rohrschneider (2006) argues that when citizens believe that a common European economic market would bring economic welfare within the state, it is more likely that support for this particular type of integration would increase.

The second factor, argues that national politics play a crucial role in determining EU support or lack thereof, as the public lacks the information necessary to make a decision regarding the EU, thus resorting to using political leaders as proxies for approval. Another study conducted by Vetik, Nimmerfelft & Taru (2006) who also studied the factors explaining EU attitudes, argue that trust in the national government also has a significant effect on the perception of EU integration. Researchers have theorised that a higher trust in the national government is linked to higher support for EU policy integration, compared to lower trust in government (Vetik et al., 2006). Further on the factor of national politics, Rohrschneider (2006) demarcates evaluations of the national regime as a significant factor. This is the case they argue that the better a national system's performance is, the higher the reluctance of the citizens would be to abandon said system over that of the EU.

The third factor, anti-immigration attitudes and by proxy, the fourth, national identity which posits that if citizens have strong attachment to their national identity, then it is likely that they dislike, perhaps even distrust and feel threatened by immigrants. If this were to be the case, it would imply these citizens would be opposed to the further integration of the European Union. This is also reiterated by McLaren (2006), as they argue that the EU poses a symbolic threat to national identity. Vetik et al. (2006) have posited similarly. They propose that states with less established and more fragile identities are less likely to show support for further integration into the European Union. Further on the topic of national identity, since Bulgaria is part of the post-Communist block, the Bulgarian identity has been linked with the value system of the communist regime (Rohrschneider, 2006). Since the value system within the state and its citizens has changed, socialist ideals no longer take precedence in the national political context of the country. Instead, with the expansion of the European Union and Bulgaria's induction into the Union, those socialist ideals have been replaced by liberal economic values (Rohrschneider, 2006). However, it is theorised that Bulgarians still hold socialist values and base their evaluations on those instead of economic and political cost-benefit analyses as is found to be done in the West (Rohrschneider, 2006).

Having laid down the details for the model which aims to anticipate to a certain degree the attitudes of citizens regarding the EU policies Schengen and Euro. As such, economic considerations, national politics and identity come forward as part of the model which this paper uses in order to answer the main research question. These factors can also be considered the benchmarks with which this study. However, while there is data which confirms these as the main factors influencing the formation, there is a possibility that other concerns may surface.

3. Methodology

3.1. Case Selection

The reason why the exploratory research approach was chosen is because, as Robbert A. Stebbins (pp.5, 2001) puts it, there is "little or no scientific knowledge about the group, process, activity, or situation [we] want to examine but nevertheless have reason to believe it contains elements worth discovering". Furthermore, confirmatory research seeks to confirm something that is already known whilst exploratory research seeks to find out that which is unknown or only partly known, as is the case of public opinion in Bulgaria regarding EU policies. On another note, while confirmatory research is efficient in dealing with the reliability of the methods used, it has some difficulty relating findings to reality (Reiter, 2017). Meanwhile, this would not pose a particular issue for this research endeavour as we seek to make certain generalisations from the gathered and processed data. In other words, the use of inductive methods of conducting research will facilitate our understanding of the socio-political reality in which the inquiry is set. However, the use of inductive methods does not imply the theory is obsolete, not used or taken into account. Rather, the theory is a starting point from

which factors are established for inquiry and discussion (Reiter, 2017) as seen in the theory section above. Theory in this regard helps in establishing order in our inquiries and gives relevance to reality by taking a look at what is going on (Reiter, 2017). This brings us to the reason why a case study approach would be most adequate in conducting this inquiry.

A case study method is chosen in consideration of three factors as explained by Robert K. Yin (2018): the research question, the temporal placement of the sociopolitical context of inquiry, and the control over research participants. To start, the main research question (What are the associations and opinions Bulgarian citizens have regarding Bulgaria's non-participation in the Eurozone and the Schengen Area?), is an exploratory question. It seeks to uncover a certain socio-political reality. This then ties in with the temporal setting or placement of the reality, in which case the research inquiry is set in contemporary times and which is likely to undergo changes in the near future. Furthermore, this inquiry does not seek to gain control over the participants in the study, as would be the case in an experimental setting. As such, the research inquiry covers all three prerequisites which Yin (2018) posits that a case study would be among the most adequate strategies. Furthermore, the research inquiry also benefits from previous theory as it is used as a guiding path towards further exploration of the unknown, a tenet also proposed by Yin (2018). However, there is an issue which is likely to be encountered such as the inability to use other types of data, such as archival records or survey data for triangulation as there are none available.

3.2. Interview Procedures

For data collection, in-depth interviews are chosen to gather data which is not easily or appropriately collected via surveys or other methods. This is so because of the nature of the research question, which makes it difficult for other research methods to capture and study in nuance. Survey items cannot capture the depth and essence of dialogue as open-ended (interview) questions do. Furthermore, as mentioned above, the focus of this inquiry is to explore topics that are either not known or there is very little known about them, something which is done with great difficulty with a survey as it cannot contain data that is "unknown".

An interview protocol and script were devised (see Appendix A and B) and the script was translated into Bulgarian. Additionally, a consent form was created and disseminated to the participants (see Appendix C). All interviews were conducted in Bulgarian, and later transcribed and analysed in Bulgarian. The interviews were transcribed in Microsoft Word via the transcription function. The transcriptions can be found in Appendix. Seven of the interviews were held in person and two online. Participants were invited via the social media platforms Instagram and Facebook as well as through phone calls. A post on the two social media platforms had been created in order to attract attention and therefore interest. However, from this post only one participant showed interest, however the researcher was unable to interview them as they did not respond to set a time for the interview. Three participants were scouted from a physical location, a local library where the researcher is based. Other participants were personally asked to join in the research by the researcher. It was necessary for two of the interviewees to answer some additional questions as there were some changes in the interview questions, specifically there were some additional questions, which they answered in text form. On average, the duration of the interviews was 14 minutes. Several of the interviews did not last longer than 20 minutes, while in one instance one lasted approximately 9 minutes.

3.2.1. Participant Descriptions

In total, nine interviews were conducted with participants from varying backgrounds, ages and sex. Two of the participants were university students. There was one retired person. The remaining participants were in different forms of employment. All participants are over the age of 18. Five participants resided in the same area where the researcher is currently based, while the remainder resided in different parts of the country (see Table 1). Four particular participants stood out the most in this research. Participant number one had a general lack of knowledge and interest regarding EU politics, and was subsequently unable to answer some of the questions posed in the interview. It was

mentioned that they would like to learn more about the workings of the European Union in the future. However, this participant stated that they wanted to answer the questions as objectively as possible and thus maintained a neutral stance on most questions. They also held no personal opinions regarding the policies and relied heavily on the opinions of those they socialise with. Participant number two has a general disinterest towards the EU as an institution. They have also stated that they have a desire to learn more about the EU. When inquired on personal opinion questions, they often had an ambiguous stance on the issues at hand due to a lack of knowledge surrounding the policies in question. Participants three and eight stood out among all participants as they had the most positive perception about the EU and within their own country. The rest of the participants did not have any particular features that stood out.

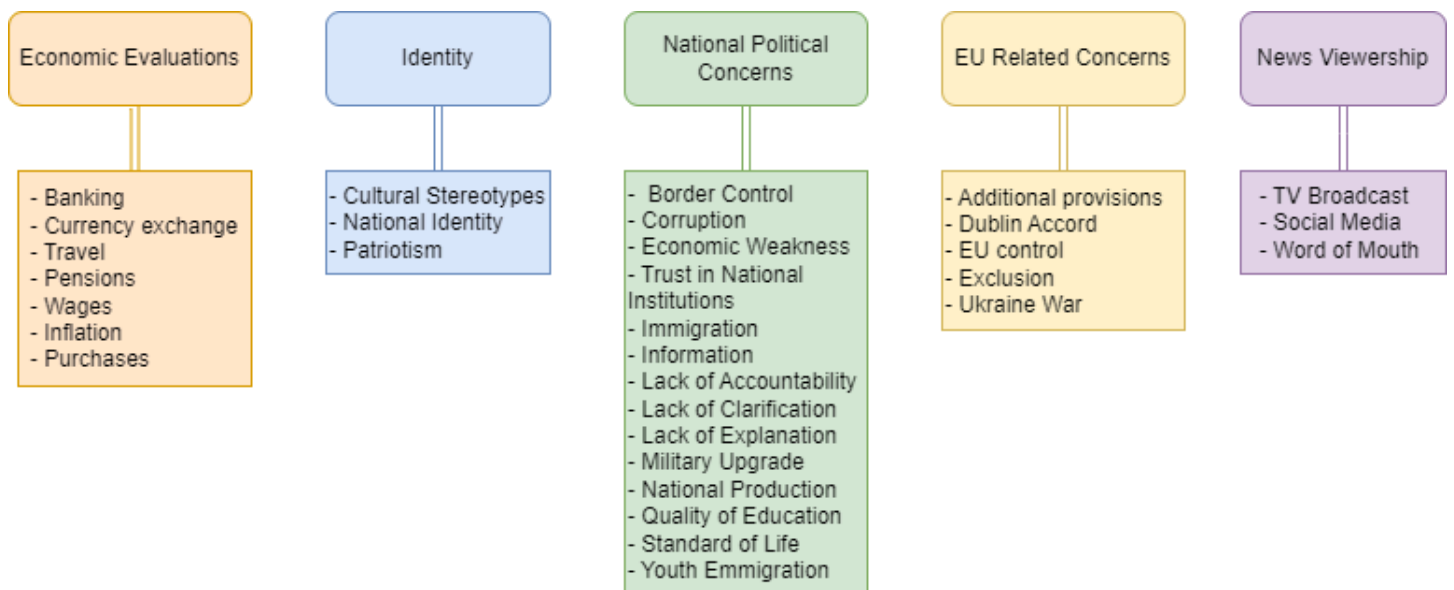
Table 1
Distribution of interview participants.

	Female	Male
Urban	2	1
Rural	3	3

3.3. Analysis

Content analysis is the method used for analysing the interviews. More specifically, manifest content analysis is the primary type of analysis conducted, as it is the face value of the content of the interviews that is significant for this particular study. Despite this, inferences and thus, interpretations, needed to be made on certain parts of the answers as they were unclear and lacked coherence. Content analysis as a research method is the most suitable for this research endeavour as it aims to understand and condense descriptions of a certain phenomenon with the use of categories to help describe the phenomenon in question (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). As such, the reason why this particular method was chosen is because of the nature of the research undertaken, which is to condense and describe the factors surrounding the opinions of the participants regarding the EU policies Schengen and Euro. Here what was attempted was to categorise deductively and code inductively the opinions of the participants (see graph 1). The reason why both deductive and inductive approaches are used is because on one hand, there was not enough knowledge on the possible factors which may be at play in the formation of public opinion regarding the policies (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008), which is why an inductive approach was chosen for coding the interviews. On the other hand, there were some concepts available which could be used in the coding process which were best suited to serve as broad deductive categories for the inductive codes. The deductive categories were derived from prior research regarding public opinion; they represent the factors that had been previously identified when exploring the theories about policy perception. These categories are “National political concerns”, “Economic Evaluations” and “Identity”. On the other hand, the inductive codes have been derived during the process of analysing the interviews. Along with the aforementioned categories, two more categories were identified as well. These are “EU Related Concerns” and “News Viewership”. With the use of Atlas.TI.23 the interviews were analysed and coded.

Graph 1
Coding Scheme.



Despite being a simple method, the description of the procedures undertaken in the process of analysing the content of the interviews is difficult. Furthermore, it is important to note that the data collected was subject to some interpretation as mentioned before, which may pose some risk to the validity of the results (Bengtsson, 2016). On the other hand, citations from the interviews are also used to illustrate certain key points and to increase the trustworthiness of the results. However, due to constraints in time and resources, it was not possible for another researcher to check and interpret the interviews and thus reach a consensus regarding the codes and categories devised, which would increase the internal validity of the findings (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

3.4. Issues Encountered

This section discusses the problems the researcher has encountered in the process of conducting the research. The problems that were encountered appeared mainly in the data collection phase of the research. There was, however, one particular issue which concerned the conceptualization and operationalisation of the concept of “nationality”. This study failed to gather a clear understanding of what nationality entails by not enquiring participants what they consider nationality and whether it is linked to the factor of identity. Furthermore, the quantification of EU interest was also not properly operationalised which led to the subjective interpretations of the answers that were given. Another aspect which would be of great benefit for future research is to set an objective measure, specifically how much, often and what kind of news-sources participants follow. This is something the researcher did not take into account ahead of time, resulting in the subjective interpretation of the given answers.

In terms of data collection, there had been an issue when trying to gather participants for interviews as the ones that had been invited to participate cited that they were not confident in being able to answer the questions from the interview as the topic concerning the European Union and its policies was either of no particular interest for them or due to personal reasons were unable to follow the news regarding the topic at hand. An observation of particular interest was the hesitancy with which some participants answered the interview questions regarding the Schengen agreement, as some of them cited having no or little knowledge about the policy and its effects on the country. One of the participants confused Schengen with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO, and it was necessary for the researcher to intervene in order to deter any further confusion. Furthermore, a conversation prior to an interview shed light on a concern which was theorised prior to the start of the data collection phase. This concerned trust in that the answers would not be disseminated and perhaps later used against them. Furthermore, one of the interviewees considered their personal opinion to be

“different from the rest”, which made them hesitant to be interviewed. However, they agreed to the procedure nonetheless with the assurance that any and all information provided will be anonymised and later deleted when the research project concludes. Furthermore, it was necessary to change the questions devised for the interview on several occasions. Despite this, the researcher finds that the list of questions did not sufficiently cover the topic it attempts to understand.

4. Results

4.1. Key Findings

This section covers the results from the analysis and interpretation of the interviews and answers the research question: *What are the associations and opinions Bulgarian citizens have regarding Bulgaria's non-participation from the Eurozone and the Schengen Area?* The answer is that the attitudes which have been studied do not give an indication of clear support or disapproval for the policies in question, Euro and Schengen. In terms of specific support, that is support for the policies in question, results have been found to be ambiguous as there is no majority in support or against the policies. One of the main observations is that a majority of the participants did not have a clear idea of what the changes following the introduction of the Euro and Schengen would be within the country and, therefore, had ambiguous opinions when inquired about their personal stances on the issue. This, along with a lack of knowledge surrounding the EU made it difficult for the participants to answer the questions posed during the interview. Another observation from the conversations with the interviewees is that they hold conflicting opinions about the two policies. On the one hand, they wish for Bulgaria to enter both policies, but on the other, they fear that this may lead to more chaos and confusion within the country. A common theme among participants is that they hope for positive changes to follow Bulgaria's transition into becoming a more integrated European Union member.

As theorised above, it is in fact the case that economic evaluations, identity and national political concerns stand at the forefront of factors which respondents cite in relation to their stances about the policies. Particularly prominent were those of national political concern. Table 2 summarises statements given by the participants in relation to the factors and the policies. However, two more factors were further identified in the process of analysis. Besides, these factors are EU related concerns and news viewership. EU related concerns bring forth those concerns which relate to other areas and policies in which the EU is involved, such as the Dublin Accord and Ukraine war. Meanwhile, news viewership deals predominantly with the ways in which the respondents have mentioned that they collect information regarding the policies and the EU in general.

The sections below go further into detail as to what it is that participants have stated to be their attitudes and opinions regarding their national institutions, the EU, the Euro and Schengen as policies.

Table 2
Influencing factors and related statements.

	Economic Evaluations	Identity	National political concerns	Other
Euro	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Dissolution of the need to exchange currencies when travelling abroad ● Increase in inflation ● Rising prices ● Banking becoming a lot easier ● Ease of purchasing, banking and other transactions ● Increase in wages ● Increase in pensions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Patriotism ● The introduction of a unified currency there is also the” depersonalisation of the country itself” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● National economy taking time to adjust to the introduced changes ● Political decisions and expectations are unclear, ● Criticism towards national institutions for not taking a more solid stance on the issue of clarification and explanation. ● Constant changes in national law to accommodate existing lobbies instead of the citizens. ● National government practices need to be cleared, as they promote the lack of accountability and the non-following of specified rules ● Corruption ● Low economic development ● Dependency on European Union 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fear of change and uncertainty ● Unfulfillment of EU conditions ● Unknown outside influence
Schengen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Long and time-consuming queues at the borders ● Redirection of sources towards other areas ● Ease of trade 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Keeping the borders in place “it is easier to save the people, our traditions and culture” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Changes in the justice system ● Investigations regarding corruption within higher levels of government ● The “unprofessional” manner of working of politicians. ● No secure Bulgaro-Turkish border ● Criminals and migrants entering the borders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Criticism towards the EU for not exerting more control ● EU’s lack of trust towards Bulgaria ● Unfulfilled EU conditions

4.2. Personal Orientations

4.2.1. News Viewership

Three interviewees mentioned that they follow the news, both national and those regarding the European Union, on a regular basis. Several of the interviewees mentioned that they only follow the national news if they “manage to catch them”. One participant stated that they used to follow the news, both national and those regarding the European Union, more before than they currently do. Another participant mentioned that they follow the news when they have the ability to do so, and that they do not follow the news regarding the European Union regularly. Meanwhile, two other participants have mentioned that they do not follow mainstream news outlets and instead rely on social media and word of mouth in order to keep up with current affairs in the state. There appears to be less interest when it comes to news regarding the European Union, where in the case of one participant stated that they do not follow the news in question at all.

4.2.2. Nationality

Participants stated that they find their nationality to be important, some of which emphasised that it is the most important for them, stating that they have “respect and love” that they are Bulgarian [1]. All participants stated that their nationality plays a role in their identity. Even more so, one participant has stated that it is how they would be perceived by foreigners, also mentioning that with nationality also come “problems and stereotypes” about the national population, “which are easy to entertain when dealing with a person from a different culture” [2]. Another participant has stated that their nationality is a form of identification for Bulgarians and that nationality is a form of identity. Patriotism was mentioned to be part of the Bulgarian nationality as well by a participant who “developed it [patriotism] within themselves over the years” [3].

4.2.3. European Citizenship

When asked about whether they regard themselves as citizens of the European Union, one participant stated that they no longer consider themselves as such but failed to mention why that is the case. Another participant responded that they do not see themselves entirely as citizens of the European Union, citing that economically they see themselves as weaker or below other Europeans, despite having the ability to travel relatively freely within the entire Union. Meanwhile, seven out of nine participants have answered that they do see themselves as citizens of the EU.

4.3. Perceptions towards National Politics

4.3.1. National Economy

When questioned about the quality of work the government has conducted in regard to the national economy up to the point leading to the interview, the participants gave varying answers. One of them, however, stated that the way the government has handled the economy will have a favourable effect, but did not mention specifically on what. Another has stated that the issue with the national economy “has not been dealt with badly”, referring to what they have heard from those they socialise with. Another has stated that “there has not been enough time for current governments to do anything about it [the state of the economy], while the previous [government] has had enough time to deal damage“ [4], citing that money received from the European Union was used merely for a single highway, which is constantly in need of repairs. The same participant also lamented that there no longer is any national production of goods. One participant stated that they believe the national institutions have dealt with the economy well in some spheres and badly in other spheres, but did not specify what those spheres were or why they think so. Another view was that the government doesn't have the intention of hindering the economy and that it is on track towards a positive development in this area. A particularly positive answer was given by a single participant, which stands in stark contrast to what others have mentioned. They have answered that the national institutions have been doing a good job in relation to the economy stating that inflation has been going down, the minimum and median wages have been rising, plans for reforms have been devised in regards to the military, the medical sector and

the educational system. In contrast to the previous answer, one participant shared that the national government has done a terrible job in regards to the national economy, stating that the “decisions taken and changes made in the constitution amount to absolute zero” [5].

4.3.2. Immigration

Most participants appear to agree that the issue of immigration has been dealt with properly by the national government, as most of them agree that refugees fleeing from war are well taken care of. Furthermore, it was stated by one of the participants that the government “has spared enough effort, resources and that the capacity of the work is very, very good” [6] as migrants running from war are taken care of by the efforts exerted by the government.

Two would criticise the government that refugees are taken better care of than the citizens of the country. Others, however, are of the opinion that the system set up to process refugees is not working as effectively as it ought to, giving the example of the refugee camp in Harmanli, Bulgaria. One participant raised a concern regarding the Dublin Accord, which is an EU regulation which establishes the criteria and mechanisms for determining the Member State responsible for examining an asylum application lodged in one of the Member States by a third-country national. One participant mentioned that the government has not done a good job, as the refugees, who are viewed as dangerous due to the lack of control within the refugee camps, are perceived to have the freedom to roam whenever and wherever they wish. They suggest measures be put in place, such as introducing curfews for when refugees can go out, as well as in which areas they are allowed to go. Another participant has a similar perception regarding the issue of immigration in that there are no policies, as far as they know, that can help control the movement of the migrants remaining in the country. One participant has stated that the government is doing a good job when taking into consideration the small budgets allocated for that area, and in particular the capturing of migrants who enter the country through illegal means, and the provision of living conditions for refugees, at the expense of the pensioners and other citizens in need of assistance. Another participant responded that the Bulgarian government has not done a good job in regards to the flow of migrants entering the borders, and as such is being criticised by Brussels. They also state that this problem poses great risks for the future development of the European Union. On the other hand, two participants stood out from the rest as they mentioned that the immigration of Bulgarians, in particular young adults, towards other European countries is an issue related to migration within the state.

4.3.3. Trust in National Institutions

Two participants stated that they have trust in the national institutions. One participant mentioned that they used to trust the national government but that this trust has been steadily decreasing, which is interpreted as having some trust. One participant mentioned that they lack an opinion on the matter (see Table 3). Another participant answered that they have some trust towards their national institutions “but not a lot” [7]. Another participant stated that they no longer have trust in their national institutions. Finally, one participant responded that they don’t have trust in the national institutions, citing that the information which is shared by these institutions is not trustworthy.

Table 3

Distribution of trust in national institutions.

Trust in National Institutions	Yes	No	Some	No opinion
	2	3	3	1

4.4. Perceptions towards the European Union

4.4.1. Perception

There have been a variety of opinions expressed by the interviewees in regard to their perception towards the European Union. One of the opinions was that it is “necessary for us [Bulgarians] to be part of the European collective, part of the European Union” [8]. Furthermore, this person also stated that despite “arising tensions regarding Bulgaria’s membership in the European Union instigated by other Members” [9], the membership is viewed as a positive circumstance by this individual. There was a second individual who perceived the Union as beneficial for the state. One individual stated that they no longer hold positive views about the European Union, but gave no reason as to why this was the case. They also stated that the existence of the Union is a “wonderful thing, and while it has the ability to aid, it also holds the ability to hinder as well” [10], but also that there is no information about whether the aid the EU distributes actually goes towards that which requires it. One participant stated that they used to agree with the politics the EU led up until the start of the war in Ukraine, from which then onward they implied that they do not agree with the current form of politics undertaken by the EU in that regard. One participant has stated that they have a positive view about the EU, but failed to mention in regards to what. A single participant stated that the feeling of trust they had towards the EU institutions has been diminishing. The reason for this was explained that they did not feel that the EU is able to overcome different types of crises in a unified, coherent manner.

4.4.2. Knowledge and Interest

One participant stated that they have an interest in the European Union and have a general idea as to what the Union represents. While another participant answered that they don’t know what the European Union is. Meanwhile, another has stated that they are not interested in the Union in general. There was some level of knowledge from the rest of the participants about the workings of the Union.

4.5. Perceptions towards Euro Introduction

4.5.1. Desire for Policy

Two participants hold the opinion that Bulgaria should have already become a member of the Eurozone in the past, and that they are already late in joining. The reason for this was explained as ‘Bulgaria is a full member of the European Union’ alongside Romania, and, therefore, it is implied that the country should not be exempt from participating in the financial policy. Three participants stated that they are against the introduction of the Euro in Bulgaria (see Table 4). Meanwhile, the rest of the participants are unsure whether the currency should be introduced. Two participants, who are unsure, have suggested that Bulgaria should make use of both currencies instead of opting for a single, unified, albeit seemingly unstable currency. One participant is unsure whether they want the Euro to be adopted, citing the loss of identity aspect and the removal of unnecessary currency exchange. One participant proceeded to explain that they wish for the Euro to become the national currency of Bulgaria, however, they believe that in its current state, Bulgaria is not ready yet for such a drastic change in the internal structure of the state.

Table 4

Distribution of participants on Euro stance.

Stance on introduction of Euro in Bulgaria	Against	For	Unsure
	3	3	3

4.5.2. Reasons for exclusion from policy

There have been several estimations as to why Bulgaria has not yet become part of the Eurozone, but none of the participants could answer this question with confidence. Two participants answered that the politics surrounding this decision are unclear within the national institutions, further stating that issues surrounding this lack of clarity as to what would be the benefits and drawbacks of this new economic system were to be put in place. Participants all agree that the latter is caused by both internal (within state borders) and external difficulties. Furthermore, two participants have criticised national institutions for not taking a more solid stance on the issue of clarification and explanation. This is a view shared by a majority of the participants. Even more, it has been theorised by one participant that a conjunct reason for the lack of clarification and explanation is due to the constant changes in national law to accommodate existing lobbies instead of the citizens. Another given reason is that there is a fear of change and uncertainty holding back the introduction of the Euro. The identity and patriotism tied to the Bulgarian Lev are other reasons why it has not been adopted yet. Another reason given is that there are practices within the national government which need to be cleared, citing that the lack of accountability and the non-following of specified rules by the Bulgarian people are the reasons for the state not being able to introduce the policy effectively. Corruption is implied to be a factor affecting the development in this area within the state. Furthermore, it is theorised by the same participant that Bulgarians and their national institutions want to be as thorough as possible before such major policies come into effect, as they want to stay ahead of the consequences. This stands in stark contrast with other responses featuring the lack of clarification and explanation from national institutions. Corruption is also a reason mentioned explicitly by a participant along with the flow of migrants from the Arab states but did not specify how exactly that affected the introduction of the policy. One participant has shared their view that currently, as Bulgaria stands in the present moment, the state is not ready to accommodate the new currency in its coffers, offering economic reasons such as economic weakness, and in particular that the national economy “is not at the necessary level” citing that in terms of remuneration “Bulgaria is among the lowest ranking country within the Union” [11]. They theorise that if the Euro were to be introduced in the state, the middle and low class will become poorer as a result. According to the same participant, this can only be mitigated if “wages get adjusted (i.e. increased) so that they are equalised to those in other EU countries” [11]. One of the external reasons that have been mentioned is the conditions set by the EU for Euro introduction and the fact that Bulgaria has not been able to fulfil these conditions as of yet. Another reason posed as to why this policy has not yet taken root yet is that “there are outside organisations which aim to cause difficulties in our country and which may even wish to decrease our [the Bulgarian] population and influence in general” [12].

4.5.3. Expected Effect of policy

One opinion regarding the ways the introduction of the Euro as the national currency would affect the country was that it would have a “very” beneficial effect on the state. The reasoning behind this answer was that, according to this individual’s personal market analyses, “it would lead to the quickest and most effective way for Bulgarians to reach the standard of life which others [countries in the Eurozone] have” [13]. Other opinions offered a less optimistic view on the introduction of the currency, stating that inflation will increase, prices will rise and that it will take time for the national economy to adjust to the introduced changes. Others were even less optimistic, stating that the average consumer and people who have retired from the workforce and receive pensions would suffer economically the most. One participant even fears that the Euro “will lead to some sort of cataclysm” [14]. It was also stated that those who would most likely benefit the most are wealthy people. Seven out of nine participants agreed that there will be negative consequences of the introduction of the currency for some period of time. However, all agree that there will also be benefits to the introduction of this policy on Bulgarian soil.

One often mentioned benefit of the Euro in Bulgaria is the dissolution of the need to exchange currencies when travelling abroad. As reiterated by another participant who stated that an effect of the Euro would be the comfort, implying that the exchange of currencies when travelling to states which

have adopted the Euro will no longer be necessary. Another expected benefit from this policy, as stated by a participant, would be that progress will catch momentum in the state, citing the increase in quality of education and in general all spheres of life within Bulgaria as they deem the current state of affairs unsatisfactory. Alongside this, it was mentioned that banking would become a lot easier as ATMs would accept Euros instead of breaking down. This was reiterated by another participant who said that it would be easier for purchasing, banking and other transactions. And again by another who, for them personally, would be easier to make purchases in other countries that have the Euro as their currency. Furthermore, one participant mentioned that by using the Euro it would become easier for foreign investors to proliferate as well. Another expected effect by a participant is that it will become easier for citizens “to travel freely and for Member States to have faster communication” [15].

A participant also mentioned that with the introduction of a unified currency there is also the “depersonalisation of the country itself” [16], in which case they meant that with the removal of the Lev, a part of the Bulgarian identity also gets lost. Further, one participant has theorised that poorer Member States are more eager to introduce the Euro than are those who are fairing relatively well. Bulgaria was one example of a poor country wishing to introduce the currency, while Sweden was given as an example of a well-to-do country in the EU which has not yet implemented the Euro as the national currency. It was further theorised by the same individual that the reason why this particular Member State has not introduced the Euro is because their economy is strong and there is no need to do so. Furthermore, another participant mentioned that if Bulgaria were to introduce the new currency, they feel that the state would become dependent on the European Union, which they viewed as a negative thing.

4.5.4. Unified Europe

When asked whether all members of the European Union should adopt the Euro, a majority agree that they should, one even going so far as to say that it is an obligation as a member of the Union and that the conditions for entering the Eurozone ought to be the same for all Member States without additional provisions for Bulgaria and Romania. All participants have agreed that the purpose of the Union is to bring the unification of all Member States under one coherent economic system. However, one participant goes further and explains that while it is important for all Member States to be unified, it is also paramount that they also keep their own national identities and the symbols that represent them such as coat of arms, flag, money and others. Another answer was given that all Member States should switch to the Euro as it would lead to more ease in general [for citizens of the European Union].

4.6. Perceptions towards Schengen

Two of the interviewees were unable to answer the questions regarding Bulgaria’s entry within the Schengen space. One of them did however have a positive opinion towards Bulgaria’s entry into the visa-free zone (see Table 5).

4.6.1. Desire for policy

One of the participants stated that they hold the same views about the introduction of the Euro as the induction of Bulgaria in Schengen, that “we [Bulgarians] are late” [17] and that it is unacceptable that Bulgaria is still not part of the accord, reasoning that there should not be any Union members exempted from joining. Another response garnered when asked about the perception towards Bulgaria’s non-participation from the policy, was that it is “catastrophic for us [Bulgarians] because there are big queues at the borders... trucks with goods and in the summertime with tourists travelling with their cars” [18]. Another participant stated that they do not hold any particular position regarding this policy but mentioned that it would be of more interest to younger generations who travel more. Another participant firmly desires Bulgaria to become part of Schengen.

Table 5*Distribution of participants on Schengen stance.*

Stance on induction of Bulgaria in Schengen	Against	For	Unsure
	2	3	3

4.6.2. Reasons for exclusion from policy

When presented with the question of what the reasons are why Bulgaria has not become part of the Schengen accord, participants were not able to answer the question with confidence. Some reasons which have been mentioned are that there are changes in the justice system, investigations regarding corruption within higher levels of government and other conditions which Bulgaria needs to fulfil, as well as “the unprofessional” manner of working of politicians. However, one participant criticised the EU for not exerting more control in these matters in order to aid Bulgaria in its efforts to become a Schengen member instead of writing reports regarding this matter. Another reason, mentioned by two participants, for the non-participation of Bulgaria in Schengen is that the Member States do not trust that Bulgaria is in fact ready to enter the accord, citing Austria as the main actor against the entry. A reason for this was that “we [Bulgarians] would not be able to protect the European borders properly” [19]. A second participant stated that the EU has good reason for not allowing Bulgaria to join the Schengen accord and that it was necessary for additional conditions to be introduced, citing that the government and the people are “undisciplined and negligent” in this regard as well as in “areas of life”. One participant stated that Bulgaria is not ready yet to become part of the Schengen accord, citing that the European Union has been observing the state and has deemed it not ready to join at this point in time. The reason for this is that the Bulgarian-Turkish border has not been and still is not secured adequately, leading to a large flow of both legal and illegal migrants into the country and who then proceed to travel towards other European members. It was stated by the same individual that it is solely due to this reason, the lack of secure borders and the country’s lack of efforts in securing the borders, that Bulgaria has not yet become a member of the Schengen accord along with its neighbour Romania. Some participants were unable to provide an answer, stating that they did not know.

4.6.3. Expected Effect of Policy

An expected effect of the opening of the national borders, according to one participant, is that it is easier and less problematic for travelers, and especially young people who go abroad in search of work. Despite this benefit, it is mentioned that there is also a drawback to this as it would become much easier for criminals to enter and for migrants who are no longer living in the country but make use of the social welfare at the expense of the citizens. However, one participant mentioned the recent development regarding Bulgaria’s entry into the Schengen area via air and sea and that they believe that the resources allocated for border control in those areas will be redirected towards land border control. The same participant, when asked about the effect of the policy in question, answered that travelers will no longer have to wait in queues for long periods of time as there will no longer be a need for thorough checks, which would ease the flow of traffic along the borders. A similar answer was given by another participant. Furthermore, they also stated that if Bulgaria were to become a member of the said accord from an “economic point of view, it would be more beneficial for other members as well as we [Bulgaria] would become the outer border of Europe and will therefore protect not only national interests but also that of the EU Members” [20]. Another participant offered that the effect of the policy would be positive in terms of trade, however, they also have reason to suspect that the subsequent positive effect may not be felt by the general population. A participant expects that Bulgaria’s entry into the accord will lead only to positive effects in “all aspects”.

4.6.4. Unified Europe

One participant had the opinion that whether a Member State becomes part of the Schengen accord should depend on its desire to be part of that policy and not be an imposition from other Member States or European institutions. Another participant mentioned that it would be “appropriate and comfortable” [21] if all Member States became part of the Schengen accord. A participant regarded the European Union as a “family’ and that if all Member States were to be part of the policy, it would be possible to visit each and every one of them as though they are “neighbours” [22] without having to have to be checked endlessly. One participant holds the belief that the European Union should be borderless and for travel to be completely unrestricted. Another participant mentioned that all Member States must be part of the Schengen accord. One participant explained that keeping the borders in place “it is easier to save the people, our traditions and culture”.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This research paper aimed to answer the research question: *What are the associations and opinions Bulgarian citizens have regarding Bulgaria’s non-participation from the Eurozone and the Schengen Area?* In doing so, it was uncovered that the perceptions regarding these policies are ambiguous. It appears that while citizens, or in this particular case the participants in the research, did perceive the EU in a generally positive way, they were not necessarily in agreement with the further integration of Bulgaria within the EU. Furthermore, not only were the theorised factors, economic evaluations, national political concerns, identity, present in the analysis, two more factors also came into view. These are EU related concerns and news viewership as well.

It is important to note that those who participated in this research have more to say about the Euro than they do about Schengen. This does not come as a surprise, as that was initially theorised to be the case. It has been observed that a common theme among participants is that they hope for positive changes to follow Bulgaria’s transition into becoming a more integrated European Union member. In terms of the desire for the introduction of the Euro in Bulgaria, only three participants wished for the currency to be implemented, another three did not want it to be implemented and the rest were unsure whether they want the currency or not. When asked why Bulgaria has not yet introduced the economic policy, participants have mentioned several reasons, both internal such as the national institutions being unable to coordinate the changes within the state, and external such as the unfulfilled conditions given from the EU surrounding the policy implementation. In terms of expected effects from the Euro, there have been several mentioned by the participants, some positive while others negative. One often mentioned positive expectation is that there will no longer be a need to exchange currencies when travelling within the Eurozone countries. When inquired whether all Member States should use the Euro as their currency, all participants agreed, stating that the purpose of the European Union is to bring unification of all Member States under one coherent economic system. In terms of Bulgaria in Schengen, findings are ambiguous, as participants appeared less confident in their answers than they were about the Euro. One participant was unable to give their opinion on the matter, stating that they did not know what the Schengen agreement was about, thus ending the interview at that point. Two participants answered that they are against Bulgaria entering the Schengen accord. Three stated that they are for Bulgaria to enter the accord. And finally, the remaining participants answered that they are unsure whether Bulgaria should enter or not. When inquired about the reasons why Bulgaria has not yet been able to be part of Schengen, the most prevalent and encompassing reason given is that Bulgaria has not yet been able to fulfil all the conditions set by the European Union. The expected effects of the policy, as stated by participants, are both positive and negative. Two often mentioned positive expected benefits is that there will no longer be long queues at the borders which can last for days and that with the policy in place trade will become easier in the region. On a more negative note, it was mentioned that criminals and illegal migrants would also be able to cross the border undeterred. It was further found that trust in national institutions is a contentious and ambiguous affair considering that only two participants clearly stated that they have trust in the institutions while the remaining participants did not share the same sentiment, partially and fully. It appears that trust in national institutions is relatively low among the participants. This goes

hand in hand with other findings as well. There are differing opinions regarding the national government's work in terms of the economy, ranging from very positive to very negative. The same cannot be said about the government's work on immigration in the country. There have been several particular issues which were brought up by participants. One of them was about the immigration of Bulgarian young adults towards other European countries in search of better-paying employment opportunities. A second issue is the lack of security along the borders. And third, is the sheltering and control of refugees, particularly those of Arab descent. There have generally been positive perceptions towards the European Union as a whole, although there have been some stances which do not necessarily agree with the notion that the European Union can bring only benefits to Bulgaria and its citizens.

There have been quite a few issues when conducting this research. These particular issues deal mainly with the data collection process. There were also a few conceptual and operationalizational issues as well, particularly with the concepts of "news viewership" and "nationality". Furthermore, the personal characteristics of the participants were not taken into account into the results as they were deemed irrelevant for the current study as the scale was not big enough to render this a necessity. However, it is important to note that in follow-up studies with bigger samples would benefit from having certain personal characteristics in their analysis in order to find patterns which were not available here. In this regard, it would be beneficial to study the differences between those who are employed by the state, by private enterprises, self-employed, unemployed and those in retirement.

Finally, there are still new developments within the country regarding these two policies, Euro and Schengen. Thus, it remains to be seen what the outcome will be for Bulgaria. Will it be able to enter Schengen and introduce the Euro? And if so, what will be the consequences of the further integration of the Member State into the European Union for the citizens? These are questions whose answers remain to be seen.

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7. Appendix

Quotes from interviews

[1] Interview 4

00:01:57 Speaker 2

Имам уважение, респект и обич към това, че съм българка.

[2] Interview 2

По позитивен начин се свързвам със националността си въпреки всички проблеми и стереотипи които ни заобикалят. Важна е защото все пак националността ми определя как ме възприемат други хора от различни култури. Както преди малко споменах „стереотипи“

[3] Interview 9

Speaker 2

Да, важна е, Как да го обясним това е патриотизъм, който е изграждан с години в мен.

[4] Interview 4

00:12:14 Speaker 2

Няма достатъчното време. Този, който имаше достатъчното време, съсипа доста неща

[5] Interview 9

Speaker 2

Във всякакъв и като политика и като като икономика... решенията, промените, които взимат в конституцията кръгла нула. Да не го нарека с по лошо.

[6] Interview 3

00:08:10 Speaker 2

Много добра. Виждам, че се полагат достатъчно.

00:08:16 Speaker 2

Усилия и ресурси, средства и и като капацитет на работата е много, много добър.

[7] Interview 5

00:00:58 Speaker 1

До известна степен да, но не много.

[8] Interview 3

00:01:54 Speaker 2

Че е необходимост да сме част от европейската общност, част от европейския съюз.

[9] Interview 3

00:02:00 Speaker 2

Приветстваме оставането ни в Европейския съюз, тъй като към момента има доста така напрежение спрямо нашите членове в Европейския съюз.

[10] Interview 7
00:02:18 Speaker 2

По този начин тя може да подпомага, но пък и до някъде и да пречи

[11] Interview 9
Speaker 2

Икономиката ни не е на необходимото ниво, разплащанията, нали трудовото възнаграждение на българските граждани също е 1 от най-слабите в Европейския съюз. По тази причина, ако нали влезнем в еврото. Българският народ нормалните хора от средна класа и бедните ще обеднеят повече. Това може да се случи само ако заплащанията в България. Нали се изравнят с. Европейските плащания, другите страни.

[12] Interview 7
00:06:59 Speaker 2

Мисля че има... Организации, които... Не желаят нашия просперитет, а точно обратното искат да ни причиняват все повече и повече трудности... Дори се стигна до... Желание да намалят нашето население, нашето влияние изобщо.

[13] Interview 3
00:03:53 Speaker 2

Анализите, които съм си ги направил моите лични анализи, смятам, че ще се доближим максимално бързо до стандарта на живот, който имат.

[14] Interview 4
00:09:05 Speaker 2

Този тази разлика между 1 и другото най-вероятно ще доведе до някакъв катаклизъм.

[15] Interview 8
00:02:48 Speaker 2

България и аз съм Съгласен да сме в Европейския съюз да вървим свободно из държавите, да пътуваме свободно, да Имам една бърза комуникация между държавите.

[16] Interview 5
00:03:46 Speaker 1

Го свързвам с обезличаване на Самата държава.

00:03:51 Speaker 1

Губи идентичност.

[17] Interview 3
00:05:01 Speaker 2

Даже закъснява.

[18] Interview 8
00:07:50 Speaker 2

Е неучастието на България. Мисля, че малко катастрофални за нас, защото Има големи опашки по границите с за транспорта. Имам предвид тирови дори лятно време, когато се пътува, има из и със за туристи с леки автомобили. И това е.

[19] Interview 5
00:07:06 Speaker 1

Нали нямаха доверие в Нашата държава нали че бихме се справили, бихме се защитавали Европейските шенгенските граници подобаващо и.

[20] Interview 5
00:08:38 Speaker 1

Ами от икономическа гледна точка, може би ако бъда част от Шенген, тоест в този случай и страните, които са като България външна граница на Шенген биха били подкрепяни финансово и не само финансово нали за да пазят границата нали тези външните граници, които са и биха се наливали повече пари защото по този начин те ще защитават интереса на повече държави.

[21] Interview 7
00:14:17 Speaker 2

да Защото ще е удобно и приятно може да се...Пътува да се ходи, да се опознава света много по лесно и удобно.

[22] Interview 7
00:13:28 Speaker 2

И защото...Ще бъдат точно като 1 семейство...И като 1 селце, в което всички живеят задружно...И спокойно можеш да отидеш при този съсед или при други или през 3-4...Къщи да отидеш на гости и така нататък ще бъде много...по-Приятно да бъде така... А не да имаш постоянно спънки и пречки стои тука чакай, да те проверим дали това как да минава, защо това не сте направили, просто ще бъде... Това е като приказка нали по-лесно.