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Master Thesis

Radicalisation through the Eyes of Young People in Bulgaria

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Abstract

This research investigated the relationship between the phenomenon of radicalisation and the perception of young Bulgarians about their current socio-economic situation. The current models that have been used to investigate the processes of radicalisation were examined in order to justify the adopted Root Cause Model. The model was adjusted to the context of Bulgaria in order to investigate the object of this study. The investigation was premised on macro level as well as micro-social and micro-individual factors adopted from the Root Cause Model in order to capture the dynamics of the relationship between the phenomena of radicalisation and the perceptions of the selected group. For the research, a qualitative approach was adopted using semi-structured interviews. Ethnicity was also considered, allowing for a comparison of conceptions within and between the main ethnic groups of Bulgarian majority and Turk and Roma minorities. The research found that Bulgarian youth appeared discontented with their socio-economic situation, with particular frustrations around poor education access and quality, lack of trust in the state and poor social integration. Overall, the findings were that Bulgarian youth were not necessarily vulnerable to the onset of radicalisation despite their discontent. However, the results were more pronounced along ethnic lines, particularly in relation to the perceived disadvantages and frustrations of the Roma minority.

1.Introduction

Recently Europe has been subject to various terrorist attacks. (Madrid in 2004, London in 2005, Norway in 2011 Paris in 2015, Belgium 2016). Bulgaria also suffered a terrorist attack in July 2012 from the Lebanese group Hezbollah. Hezbollah was targeting Israeli citizens visiting Bulgaria (IMFA,2012). Manifesting itself globally as well as on a European level, the phenomenon of radicalisation has been developing at high speed.

Consequently, the study for preventing and understanding radicalisation has become a priority (CSD, 2015). There has been a stark rise in publications that “explore the motives and causes of radicalisation, as well as the processes whereby individuals and groups come to espouse radical ideas and engage in violent actions” (CSD, 2015, p.7). Even though scientific studies on the phenomenon of radicalisation have increased over the last two decades, a universally accepted definition is still to be developed. Coolsaet (2011) believes that the phenomenon is poorly defined, complex and controversial. However, one widely accepted definition of radicalisation describes it as “*the process whereby individuals come to hold radical views in relation to the status quo*” (Bartlett et al, 2010, p.1). It is also important to note that the phenomenon of radicalisation is highly context-bound, dependent on sociological and political characteristics as well as ideological and psychological ones. Understanding and untangling the complex process of radicalisation is of importance due to the multiple attacks that have been committed over the last decade. Even though a universally accepted definition does not exist yet, a difference between cognitive and behavioural radicalisation has been established. Cognitive radicalisation does not necessarily result in endangering democracy and does not always involve threats or use

of violence in order to attain the its stated goals. (Veldhuis & Staun, 2009). The second definition is recognised as behavioural or violent radicalisation and focuses on the acceptance and active dedication of using violence as a mean to attain a desired goal (Neuman, 20013). The relationship between the two definitions is complex, and further research into this is required for a fuller understanding of how, and if, one may lead to the other (Veldhuis & Staun, 2009). However, the focus of this research will be placed on cognitive radicalisation, investigating the process of radicalisation through the perceptions of young people in Bulgaria.

Bizina (2014) suggests that radicalisation in Western Europe and North America is becoming a prominent threat to young people (18-30 years old). "Socially isolated, disenchanted young people turn to extremism in their search for identity, acceptance and purpose which they are unable to find in the community that is more often concerned with wealth accumulation rather than healthy relationship-building" (Bizina, 2014, p.1).

Heitmeyer & Sitzer (2008) suggest that there is a link between radicalisation and the formation of identity and self-image. Matters of identity and self-image are highly important during adolescence, making young people more vulnerable to radicalisation. In their quest for personal meaning there is a greater chance of young people to come into contact with radical movements as they offer ideologies that relate to their life questions (Lub,2013).

Therefore, young people are seen as a vulnerable group, susceptible to radicalisation. A great number of studies strive to explain the process of radicalisation of young people and youth minorities, focusing on different factors in order to conceptualize the phenomenon (Bizina,2014; Bos, Doosje & Looseman, 2009; Doosje et al.2012; Meeus, 2015; Valk & Wagenaar, 2010). However, there is no conducted research that focuses on the phase prior

to becoming radicalised. Bos et al (2009) pay special attention to the importance of how situations are perceived and interpreted by young people. They believe that young people's perceptions and interpretations of the modern world contribute to an understanding of radical behaviour and cognition. Bos et al (2009) claim that the manner through which young people perceive the situation they are in may affect the process of radicalisation and radical thinking: "After all, how people think, behave, and feel is affected to a large extent by how they interpret situations" (Bos et al, 2009, p.1). Therefore, attention to how young people perceive the modern society they operate within is of utter importance. The focus of this thesis will therefore be placed on how young people in Bulgaria perceive their own socio-economic situation in relation to the process of radicalisation.

The phenomenon of radicalisation remains understudied in Central, East and Southeast Europe (CSD, 2015). Even though occurrences that can relate to religious, right and left wing radicalisation and football hooliganism can be observed in Bulgaria, hardly any studies or policies focusing on radicalisation in Bulgaria exist. A reason for this could be that there is no official information of involvement in acts of violent radicalisation or terrorist attacks by Bulgarian citizens at home or abroad (CSD, 2015). However, a distressing trend approving the acts of Islamist organisations within segments of isolated and marginalised Roma communities has been observed (CSD, 2015). Regarding Bulgaria specifically, the most prominent recent example of radicalisation in Bulgaria is of religious radicalisation. In the city of Pazardzhik one Imam and 13 of his associates were convicted of preaching an anti-democratic ideology, incitement of hatred through Salafism and participation in an unregistered organization in 2014. The group was accused of working with an unregistered branch of the Islamic foundation Al Waqf-Al Islami which had been set

up in the Netherlands mainly through funding by Salafi circles in Saudi Arabia was suspected to have been working with the group. The Salafi circles refer to an ultraconservative branch of Islam. Unexpectedly, due to the indictment being deemed unclear and displaying procedural violations the Court ruled that the trial should not go ahead (Stoilova, 2016).

Taking into consideration the aforementioned example of religious radicalisation in Pazardzhik it is worth providing some further context as this the only case of direct government action. Bulgaria is a European Union country where Muslims are not recent immigrants but a centuries-old community, mostly ethnic Turkish descendants of Ottoman rule that ended in 1878 (Stoilova, 2016). They are the second biggest minority in Bulgaria followed by the Roma minority. The Roma minority is also recent, settling there in the 14th century. Unfortunately, as Boneva writes, 'the ideology of diversity and ethnic tolerance is not really in this part of the world' (1995). Unsurprisingly Roma have been one of Bulgaria's most disadvantaged minorities. Despite successive government's attempts at simulating ideas of national homogeneity, the policies of assimilation and acceptance have only caused further division between various ethnic groups. furthermore, another result of this policy is the stabilisation of ethnic groups. (CSD 2015). For those reasons ethnicity in relation to radicalisation will also be investigated through the participants' sense of belonging, providing a ground-up basis for understanding radicalisation in Bulgaria.

Consequently, even though radicalisation in Bulgaria does not appear to be prominent within research, and only recently have policy debates been raised in the political agenda, trends indicate that different types of radicalisation can be observed.

Considering current studies that indicate that radicalisation of young people is a developing threat, this thesis will shed light on the potential pre-phase of radicalisation in Bulgaria through young people's perceptions.

2. Theoretical Exploration

2.1 Conceptual Models of Radicalisation

Various phase models have been developed that explain radicalisation as phase based process. Precht (2007) suggests a four phase pattern of radicalisation with the following stages: Pre-radicalization; Conversion and Identification; Indoctrination and increased group bonding; actual acts of terrorism or planned plots. Borum (2011) proposed a similar four-phased model called the "terrorist mindset". One of the most popular phase models for explaining radicalisation is the top-down model developed by the Danish intelligence services (PET). The PET model differentiates various stages of the radicalisation process within which the individual becomes more and more radicalised in each stage. The first stage starts by an individual being susceptible to radical cognition after meeting a radicaliser. Then the individual narrows down their circle of friends and family, called the "hardening phase". Following is the act of watching and displaying interest in relation to violent videos of terrorist in a battle and the killing of hostages. Another similar model of radicalization came from the New York Police Department's (NYPD) Intelligence Division. The NYPD report suggests a model for Western home-country citizens who adopt a Jihadi-Salafi ideology through a four stage linear process: 1. Pre-radicalization 2. Self-Identification 3. Indoctrination 4. Jihadization. A different approach is Moghaddam's (2005), "Staircase to Terrorism" model. The staircase model has five successive levels

focusing on the narrowing of each floor as the individual ascends from the ground floor to terrorism.

Noticeably there is an abundance of phase models that try to delineate the process of radicalization. However, empirical studies are rare and do not support the models fully. Furthermore, although most conceptual phase models seem to be theoretically useful they all differ somewhat. There are two significant weaknesses in relation to the methodology and substance of the phase models. Simple phase models use 'selection on the dependent variable', as the researcher selects cases with specific values on the dependent variable, which leads to patterns with similar results. By using examples of 'successful' radicalisation, the researchers develop a conjecture of what the individual's radicalisation process might have been, starting with the end result and working towards the initial phases. This methodology produces biased results harming the model's ability to analyse hypotheses about causal inferences. The dependent variable should be more varied to observe what the relation is between the hypothesized variables and a specific outcome on the dependent variable. Phase models make the assumption that radicalisation follows a linear path, and fail to provide for the variation of 'successfully' or 'unsuccessfully' radicalised individuals. It is important that a person's individual circumstances and life be taken into account on a macro and micro level when examining the radicalisation process (Veldhuis & Staun, 2009). It is hoped the methodology of this text approaches these critiques.

2.2 The Root Cause Model

There remains no singular explanation for radicalisation the causes of the phenomenon are as diverse as they are abundant (Loza, 2007). The Root Cause Model utilized in this research attempts to detect causal factors that explain the process of radicalisation as a context-bound phenomenon. However, not every single causal factor that is included in the model is a necessary condition for the process of radicalisation. Therefore, Veldehuis & Staun (2009) believe that the manners through which factors contribute to radicalisation differ by individual. Their provides a framework that allows for an analysis of “how casual variables relate to each other and how they shape the circumstances under which radicalisation is more – or less – likely to occur” (Veldehuis & Staun, 2009, p.21). The main focus of the analysis is then the “embedded individual”. The model departs form the idea that radicalisation can only be understood through the individual and their social environment. According to the Root Cause Model the phenomenon of radicalisation can be defined as an individual circumstance occurring in a certain social context. Therefore, the model focuses micro and macro level factors (Figure 1). For this research, while this model observes the process of radicalisation, we will use it to observe the perception of young people in Bulgaria of their socio-economic situation in relation to radicalisation. This model is nonetheless suitable to this research as it dynamically deploys factors on micro and macro level and their interaction.

| | Types of causes* | | <i>Types of catalysts*</i> |
|-------------|-------------------------|---|-------------------------------|
| Macro level | | Political Economic Cultural | Trigger Events |
| Micro level | Social | Social identification Social interaction & group processes Relative deprivation | Recruitment Trigger Events |
| | Individual | Psychological characteristics Personal experiences | Recruitment Trigger Events |

* The factors in the model illustrate the type of causal factors categorised at each level, and can be complemented and extended by related factors.

Figure 1. (Veldehuis & Staun, 2009)

Macro-level factors do not fully explain the process of radicalisation. Rather, they are a precondition of the process of radicalisation by illustrating the context within which the phenomenon occurs. The scrutiny of the micro-level factors is imperative to understanding why some people tend to radicalise more than others. Those factors are divided into two subcategories: social factors and individual factors. Social factors focus on the individual's position with regards to others while individual factors emphasise personal circumstances, how people interpret situations they are in, give meaning to them, and respond (Veldehuis & Staun, 2009, p.21). The causal relationship of the macro and micro factors and their interaction can be observed in Figure 2.

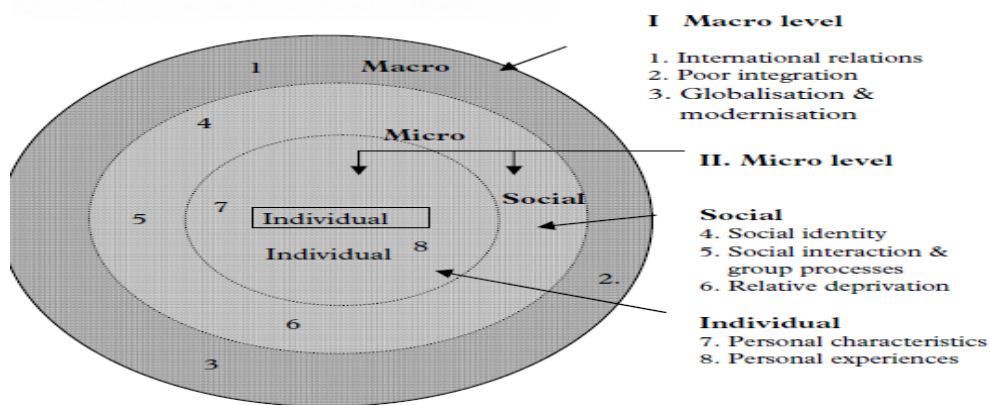


Figure 2. (Veldehuis & Staun, 2009)

2.2.1. Macro-level Factors

This text will use the macro-level factors of 'poverty', 'poor integration' and 'civil trust' from the model. In order to focus on these factors the economic and political context in Bulgaria since the fall of communism should be given. Since 1989 Bulgaria changed fourteen governments and only three completed their mandate (Lavergne, 2010). The civil discontent that occurred in 1991, 1997, 2009 and 2013-14 exemplifies the inability of the political elites to negotiate autonomy within the institutionalization of democracy. The commonality between the aforementioned protests is their discontent with government corruption, lack of transparency, and the disparity between rich and poor (Lipkis, 2013). In 1991 students demonstrated against the Bulgarian Socialist Party which resulted in their resignation. The protest in 1997 was similar, supporting the Union of the Democratic Forces (UDF) and demanding the resignation of the Socialist Party (BSP). From humble beginnings, the movement grew to a 50,000 march in Sofia. The Bulgarian Parliament building was attacked, locking legislators inside the building and setting fires near the exits. A smaller movement against the coalition that is currently in power was carried out in 2009. However, it did not result in the resignation of the government. (Lavergne, 2010). 2013 is known as the year of protests, where Bulgarians protested against the rising monopoly of privately owned utility companies. From June 2013 to January 2014 protests took place against the appointment of media mogul Delyan Peevski as head of the State Agency of National Security (DANS). In October of 2013 the Student Occupy Movement occupied Sofia University (Lipkis, 2013).

The economic reforms that accompanied this politically turbulent period were articulated under the discourse of no-choice-but-capitalism. This compromised the position of the average Bulgarian, weakening the legitimacy of the government. The sharp rise in corruption also increased discontinuity between the demos and the political elites. Corruption occurred within the spheres of economy, politics and the judiciary system (Grodeland, 2005). The anti-corruption policies that have been implemented have been ineffective, further undermining the trust in the judicial, executive and legislative institutions (Grodeland 2005). Regarding the rhetoric of radicalization, Sandbrook & Romano (2004) believe that globalization produces conditions that can foster the emergence of extremist movements. The growing dependence on unregulated markets subjects people to abrupt economic changes. Such tensions, combined with externally influenced austerity programmes challenge the legitimacy and coherence of weak states, such as Bulgaria, in transition (Sandbrook & Romano, 2004). Liberalisation affected young people particularly. With the state withdrawal from the regulation of relations among the social groups, young people were bereft of the certainty of the previous structure of the state-socialist societies, transitioning into the sea of uncertainties of a market society (Kovacheva, 2001).

Poor Integration, Poverty and Civil Trust

Social integration allows for all individuals to participate in the social economic, cultural and political life on the basis of equality and dignity. The integration of young people is mainly operationalized through access to education and employment (Alexandris, 2012).

“In Bulgaria, however, being a young person is not an advantage but a disadvantage” (Mateva, 2007, p1). According to Eurostat (2014) the inactivity rate of young people in Bulgaria is 73%. Young people in Bulgaria struggle to find employment and are often trapped into unattractive low-paid jobs after obtaining a university degree (Mateva, 2007). Tsanov et al (2011) found that income inequality in Bulgaria grew over the last three decades, disproportionately affecting young people and elderly over 65. Moreover, the unemployment rates between the selected ethnic groups (Bulgarians, Turks and Roma) differ significantly (Figure 3). Lai (2007) argues that that countries with higher economic inequality experience higher levels of terrorism. It is of importance then to observe how young people feel in relation to their integration and experiences in the labour market.

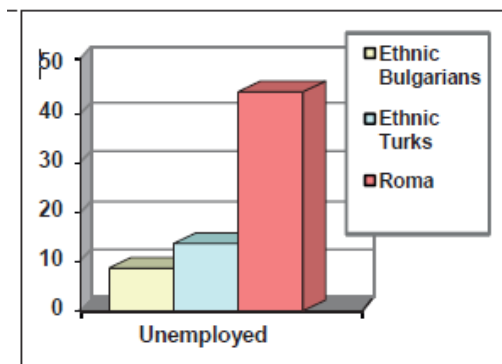


Figure 3. Unemployment among ethnic communities in %, (Tsanov et al (2011))

According to Tsanov et al (2011) and Alexandris (2012) education is a substantial factor in radicalisation. For Mohammadi & Zaman (2014) young people in universities are more inclined to rebuke extreme radical views and violence. Most students at university are more concerned about their employment prosperity rather than being allured into extremist thinking (Mohammadi & Zaman, 2014). Extremist ideas are more likely to be

adopted from 'peers and influential figures' rather than from schools and universities. Even highly-educated known terrorists were unlikely to have been radicalised through the education system (Davies, 2014). Richardson (Souwla, 2015) believes that education is the best antidote to radicalisation. Terrorists are prone to adopt an over-simplified view of the world and education serves to counter an oversimplified outlook (Souwla, 2015) Therefore, this text suggests that education is important, not only for social integration, but prevention of the process of radicalisation. The education level of the population between 1989-2011 shows a stable increasing trend (Tsanov et al, 2011). 22.8% of Bulgarians had a university education in 2011. The high school graduates percentage points reached 47.6%. For the Turks these data are respectively: 4.1% and 26% in 2011. This increase is shared even less amongst the Roma, showing 0.3% and 6.9% respectively (Tsanov et al, 2011).

Taking into consideration this political overview, the feeling of trust/distrust young people hold towards the representative institutions and political elites will be explored. In a situation when a populace observes the unfair amassing of leaders' wealth through corruption, while the government fails to deliver services, sentiments of anger and discontent may lead to radicalisation (Mary, 2007). Mitev & Kovacheva (2014) argue that despite the government's statements that young people in Bulgaria are a political priority, little has been done to address their concerns. The situation presents a lack of policy for those without education, a lack of apprenticeships with practical modern equipment, a lack of qualifications which meet economic demands and a lack of counselling for young people to build motivation (Kovacheva, 2006). It is unsurprising that Bulgarian youths retain distrust towards democratic institutions. The level of institutional trust amongst youth is

relevant to prospects of political stability. Young people no longer rely on the state to solve their problems but rather look for alternative solutions (Mitev & Kovacheva, 2014)

The lack of access and the poor quality of education as well as the unemployment and underemployment of young people may result in alienation, marginalization and exclusion (Alexandris, 2012). Khosrokhav's research (2014) also posits poverty and the sense of social exclusion as a cause of radicalization. Consequently, this text approaches the factors of poverty, education as well as trust/distrust in democratic institutions for the purpose of this research. Considering the rather unstable socio-economic climate in Bulgaria as well as the high-levels of distrust (Alpha, 2015) this text suggests these factors can explain how young people perceive their situation in relation to the process radicalization on a macro level.

2.2.2. Micro- social factors:

Self-categorization and social identity

Identification with social groups is argued to be a particularly accurate predictor of social behaviour according to Veldhuis & Staun (2009). Individuals' behaviour depends to an extent on whom they identify with. Veldhuis & Staun (2009) consider group identification a factor for the process of radicalisation. Respectively, the theories utilized in the model will be applied in relation to the selected ethnic groups of this study (Bulgarians, Turk, Roma). Self-categorization (Reich, 1998) and social identity (Tajfel, 1982) theory conceptualises people's tendencies to define themselves in terms of group memberships. Both theories suggest that people define themselves in relation to group membership

rather than the self. The social identification that is derived from such membership allows for differentiation between a perceived own group, referred to as an in-group and other groups that are the out-groups. A person can obtain as many social identities as groups with which to identify based on ethnicity, profession, religion, gender. When a certain social identity is salient it provides a framework through which the individual interprets and analyses the world (e.g. Doosje et al, 2002). Furthermore, self-perceived group membership is of such importance to self-conceptualisation it is suggested that an individual feels good about themselves when feeling good about their group. In the context of this research exploration as to whether young people identify themselves not only as a group based on their age (as youth) but ethnicity or/and religion, will be made. The text will also focus on the attitudes and feelings individuals obtain towards different groups based on their ethnicity or/and religious preferences.

Relative deprivation

Gurr (1970) suggests the theory of relative deprivation as an explanation of aggression and rebellion. He believes that the perception of individuals' situations in comparison to other social groups causes rebellion rather than absolute deprivation. According to Merton's (1938) strain theory individuals in society obtain the same desires and needs. However, these desires are not equally fulfilled for everybody and when people's expectations are not met they experience strain, causing delinquency (Piazza, 2011). The arguments of both theories will be used in this research to observe how young people perceive themselves as individuals belonging to a certain group in Bulgaria. Moreover,

ethnic and religious belonging will also be taken into consideration when exploring feelings of relative deprivation.

In relation to the state Gurr (1970) also integrates group motivation for political violence with collective opportunities to do so. When accompanied by repression from the state, collective or social status disadvantages can generate cohesive minority group identities. Together with a sense of otherness vis-à-vis the majority these collective disadvantages can produce alienation from mainstream society resulting in profound grievances within subgroups. Moreover, Ross (1993) suggest that the grievances of marginalised subnational communities are a root cause of terrorism. Based on these arguments this text will attempt to identify whether there are any feelings of exclusion and grievance within groups based on age, ethnicity and religion.

2.2.3. Micro-Individual Factors:

The micro-level will focus on psychological vulnerabilities in relation to the need for meaning. Vulnerability is defined as a state in which an individual is inclined to attack, harm or damage. Baumeister (1991) believes that psychological vulnerabilities should be considered as factors in understanding pathways to violent extremism as they can predispose some people to increased engagement in comparison to others. The “need for meaning” is a relevant vulnerability especially to young people and the process of identity development. According to Baumeister & MacKenzie (2014) the process of identity development can be complicated and uncertain. Hogg (2009) believes that sometimes young people gravitate towards existing structures of beliefs with little critical thinking to

cope with the process of identity development. It is then that the “absolutist, black and white nature of most extremist ideologies” appeals to the individuals feeling overwhelmed by the complex and stressful process of finding meaning. Moreover, the quest for meaning or significance, as referred to by Kruglanski (2014), shares characteristics which “constitute a major, universal, human motivation variously labelled as the need for esteem, achievement, meaning, competence, control, and so on.” (Kruglanski et al., 2014, p. 73)

While radical individuals possess specific, varied goals, these goals are part of a general human need for “esteem, achievement, meaning, competence, control, and so on.”

(Kruglanski et al., 2014, p. 73) Therefore, it may be that people who radicalise are seeking one of the above psychological needs for meaning. Through processes of radicalisation, radical belief structures may subdue previous moral limits, leading to aggressive behaviour in order to pursue personal or political goals.

Baumeister (1991) suggests the quest for meaning is driven by four component needs: 1) sense of purpose 2) efficacy 3) value and 4) self-worth. This research will focus on all four components to observe how young people perceive themselves within the society they operate in. The first need is for purpose. The essence of this need focuses on the perception that current life situations are connected to future events. The need for purpose is divided into two main categories: goals and fulfilments. Goals are operationalised through desired, potential future situations. The feeling of positive affect and attainment of goals usually comprise fulfilments (Baumeister & MacKenzie, 2014). The second need is value, which is a sense derived from an individual’s belief that their actions are virtuous within moral norms, that thoughts and behaviours are good and justifiable (Baumeister & MacKenzie, 2014). Usually values are structured in a hierarchical manner. By appealing to a

more general rule based on a broader system of principles particular actions are deemed right or wrong. Through the utilisation of values as guidance individuals justify their actions in a manner through which they increase positive feelings about themselves and decrease negative ones like guilt or anxiety. The third need refers to efficacy. According to Baumeister & MacKenzie feelings of efficacy are derived from the sense of control over outcomes in life. Moreover, people often feel a necessity to exert some control over events, which is operationalised through the belief that an individual is making a difference. As efficacy is the belief that one has control, being able to control an environment is one way of securing efficacy (Baumeister & MacKenzie, 2014). Self-worth, which is the fourth need, stems from a self-perception of being fundamentally “good” and possessing desirable characteristics. One way of achieving self-worth is the motivation to feel superior over other people. An effective strategy used by individuals in order to increase self-worth is downward social comparison (Wills, 1981). Downward social comparison is operationalised through comparison to individuals who are worse off which increases their feelings of self-worth. The self-serving bias is another effective strategy which assists in securing a sense of self-worth (Bradley, 1978). The self-serving bias allows people to take credit for their success and place responsibility for failures on external circumstances, regardless of the actual reasons.

Following the theoretical framework, the question this research will attempt to answer is:

How are young peoples’ perceptions about their own socio-economic situation related to the process of radicalisation?

3. Research method

3. 1. Justification research strategy

For the purpose of the current study, qualitative research was conducted. The data was obtained in the form of semi-structured interviews in order to acquire an in-depth answer to the research question. By utilising semi-structured questionnaires, the participants were free to share personal opinions and provide a full perspective of their own perception. The interview questions were structured around the Root Cause Model used as a primary theory within this research. Therefore, the questionnaire consisted of both macro and micro level questions. The macro level questions focused on gathering information of the participant's perceptions on unemployment, education, trust/distrust and poverty. The micro level questions were accordingly divided into social and personal micro level questions. The social micro level questions focused on collective identity and relative deprivation while the micro personal level aimed at exploring the need for meaning. In addition, a set of questions casting light on the law case against the Imam and his 13 followers in Bulgaria for teaching Salafism were added. The questions aimed at exploring whether the participants were familiar with the case and what feelings and opinions they held on the topic in order to gain insight into their attitude towards radicalisation. Table 1 in the appendix contains the theoretical concepts utilised in the questionnaire as well as their operationalisation.

3.3 Selection of research respondents & data collection methods

The research questioned 14 participants that were divided according to the ethnic structure of the population. The ethnic diversity in this research was based on the last census in Bulgaria that revealed that the Bulgarian ethnic group comprises 84,8% of the Bulgarian Population followed by the Turkish ethnic group with 8.8% of the population. The Roma ethnicity is the third with a share of 4.9%. The participant group consisted of 8 young people who belong to the ethnic Bulgarian group, 4 to the ethnic Turkish group and 2 to the ethnic Roma group. The participants that took part in this research were between the ages of 18 and 30 years old and had different socio-economic statuses, educational backgrounds, ethnicities and religious beliefs. Six of the participants were young individuals that worked for Sofia Security Forum, the research centre associated with this project. Contacts were provided by the company. From those six participants three had Bulgarian ethnicity and three had Turkish ethnicity. During an open lecture focusing on the refugee wave in Bulgaria held at a politico- cultural centre called the “Red House” in Sofia, I introduced my study and was approached by five more participants who expressed desire to participate in my study (three ethnic Bulgarians, one ethnic Turk and one ethnic Roma). A participant with a Roma ethnicity volunteering at a leading Roma organization (“Amalipe”) also agreed to be interviewed. The last three participants (ethnic Bulgarians) came from Sofia University. All interviews were held individually in settings according to the participant’s convenience. Seven of the interviews were held in closed off rooms at the office of Sofia Security Forum. Six interviews were carried out in cafés which the participants found convenient to meet. One interview was held over Skype due to inability for a physical meeting. Interviews were predicted to last 40 minutes and ultimately lasted

between 25 and 70 minutes. All participants gave consent at the beginning of the interview. Beforehand they were provided with information about the purpose of the research, the procedures involved, the estimated length of the interview and confidentiality measures. Furthermore, it was explicitly stated that participation is voluntary and that participants have the right to skip questions, topics or to stop the interview completely at any time if they wish to.

3.4 Analysis & tools

A coding system that allowed for the identification of re-occurring themes across the data was developed from the approach of Hsieh & Shannon (2005). A direct content analysis method was adopted with the reasoning that this approach is based on a certain theory in order to find supporting or non-supporting evidence. Directed content analysis also allowed for the exploration of the selected theories from the Root Cause Model and their relation to the answers of the participants. Despite the broad nature of the questions, they were directed at exploring specific issues from the selected theory. Moreover, a conventional approach was used as many codes were added in the process of coding. For the first three interviews the data was repeatedly read to achieve immersion. Example could be that the participants indicated lack of experience as a factor for labour market inequality. Therefore, both inductive and deductive analysis was used in order to construct a coding tree (Appendix I, Table 2). A software program called MAXQDA was utilised for the coding of the interviews, allowing for a more accurate analysis of the data.

4.Results

4.1. Macro-Factors: Employment, Education, Trust and Distrust and Poverty

“Everywhere they want some work experience, which realistically you are unable to have; therefore, I do believe there is unequal access”

In relation to the labour market Bulgarian youth appear to hold negative perceptions. The majority of young participants claimed they don't have equal access to the labour market. The main reason suggested was the employees' requirement for working experience, which the majority of the interviewees found highly problematic.” *You can be very good, highly educated, you can be extremely good at what you do, but you do not get employed because in your curriculum vitae there isn't enough work experience”*. A pattern in the answers revealed that this requirement was often perceived as unjust in relation to the current situation of the participants. Nine of the participants who obtained university degrees felt unable to meet this requirement because they chose to enrol at university and could not acquire enough professional experience. Moreover, the majority felt like the education they obtained did not prepare them for the labour market. The main complaint was that the educational system is not connected with the labour market. Lack of internships and practical courses in the context of their studies appear to be absent in Bulgarian universities and schools. The majority of the participants shared disappointment in relation to their desire to practice what they have studied. The things that were taught at university and school appear to lack relevance to real employment according to the majority, apart from the two interviewees with medical education. However, three

participants claimed that young people actually have better chances for employment as they are technically more advanced, easier to train, much more adaptive and willing to work for a lower payment.

Education and employment were referenced together by all participants. The majority indicated that there is no access to a desirable education due to financial impediments. Even though there are scholarships and grants many of the participants shared that every year the requirements for receiving such support changed causing financial instability and confusion.

“...also there is the financial factor, because no matter how much we pretend education costs money and not everyone can afford it”.

All participants expressed a belief that obtaining a bachelor degree, or further, should provide advantage when seeking employment. However, the majority expressed concerns regarding the quality of education and their subsequent integration into the labour market. *“People know how easy it is to graduate in Bulgaria, what nonsense is being taught at university”.* Moreover, all of the participants criticized the educational system on all levels: primary, secondary, university. *“The educational system is morally wrong; it just doesn’t work. The system is not innovative and stimulating in any way and does not offer desirable education”.* The majority believed that the educational system requires comprehensive reform. The low wages of the teachers, the poor educational approaches, lack of student financial support, and lack of classes focusing on practice and internships were the main grievances of the interviewees. Consequently, the majority of the participants considered education not to be a substantial factor in relation to their socio-

economic integration. Amongst the suggestions for changes in relation to care and support all participants expressed desire for a full educational reform. Great emphasis was also placed on transparency, especially with regards to European funding. The provision of better social support operationalized through healthcare and public transport were also raised.

All seven of the currently employed participants shared experiencing no great difficulties when seeking employment. However, many felt that this was mainly a possibility in spheres within which there is no career development (such as bartenders and waitresses) or through the utilisation of networks, nepotism or the private sector. Networking and nepotism were considered more influential for better integration above education. *“In most spheres you don’t need education...depends how resourceful and what connections you have”*. Personal qualities as well as persistence were also indicated as being strong influencers in terms of better socio-economic integration. Regardless of their negative perception towards the standard of life in Bulgaria the majority of the participants stressed the importance of their own qualities for achieving their objectives. The participants’ dissatisfaction expressed in relation to the factors of education and employment was often expanded to a general frustration with the unsatisfactory level of goods and services available to the populace.

“You don’t have enough money to cover anything. You have to work restlessly and still be on a minimum.”

The absence of a middle class in Bulgaria was a point made by all of the participants in relation to their concern for successful integration. The majority pointed out the

discrepancy between minimum and average wage and the standard of life, especially in Sofia. However, few participants argued that Bulgarian citizens complain more than necessary. *“Not that I argue that there isn’t lack of services or low wages, but I believe Bulgarian citizens perceive themselves as poorer than they are...Life is not that bad here”*.

Religion was not perceived as a factor with regards finding employment and accessing education, however, ethnicity was, especially with a focus towards the Roma minority in relation to education and employment. The majority indicated problems regarding the Roma minority, who, according to their perceptions, mainly had access to poor-quality Roma schools in their neighbourhoods and low prospects for post-primary education. Hence, the Roma minority was perceived as facing the most impediments in terms of integration by all three ethnic groups due to lack of access to secondary education. Apart from the two participants with Roma ethnicity, five Bulgarians also shared a concern that ethnicity could unfortunately be considered a factor based on employees’ prejudices towards the Roma minority. Moreover, the Roma group was also perceived as the most economically disadvantaged. The majority argued that the Roma are poorly integrated and economically disadvantaged due to the lack of efficient integration policies. On the contrary more than a third of the participants perceived the Roma minority as refusing to integrate. Some argued that the Roma are taking advantage of the welfare system without attempting to improve their living situation and refusing to integrate despite state support.

Unsurprisingly, the predominantly negative sentiment regarding the level and access of education as well as integration on the labour market were mirrored in the participants’ feelings of trust/distrust towards the state.

“The state is absent. Not that I do not trust the state, I do not perceive this state as a state at all. This is a parody of a state. We cannot speak of trust and creating conditions.”

There were no positive answers regarding the care and support relationship between the state and young people. All 14 participants shared that they feel the state does not provide enough, or any care, for young people. Young people, as a group, feel rather neglected and unsupported. There was a shared opinion that there are no effective social policies and programs that enhance young people’s participation in society or their personal development. Furthermore, all of the participants felt their interests are underrepresented or not represented at all by the respective political institutions. The majority acknowledged the existence of a political discussion targeting young people but have accepted this as political propaganda and empty promises. *“Youth is discussed, but that is just throwing dust in our eyes, nothing has been done in practice”* is the general attitude the participants hold towards the political elite and institutions. The feeling of lack of support and representation explained why all participants felt unprotected with the majority expressing inclinations to act outside the realms of law in order to protect their rights. However, all of them explained that in such cases their deeds will be within moral frames and thus not harming others.

4.2. Micro-Social Factors: Self-Categorization, Social identity and Relative Deprivation

In terms of identifying as young people the participants in this research did not feel disadvantaged based on their age group in comparison to other groups. The majority of the respondents did not deem religion of principal importance for their socio-economic

situation. In this research only four participants identified themselves with a religious belonging; one Christian and three Muslims. However, none were practicing their religion strictly. Ethnicity appeared to be more influential in relation to self-perceptions about current socio-economic situations. The meaning of ethnic belonging was stronger for the participants with Turkish and Roma ethnicity. The majority claimed that belonging is relevant in order to know *“who you are and where you come from”*.

Perceptions about the influence of ethnic belonging contrasted between the ethnic Bulgarians and the other two groups. Ethnic Bulgarians shared that their belonging had negative influence only when outside Bulgarian borders, while Turks and especially Roma felt that their ethnic belonging often had a negative impact. As a majority ethnic group only one Bulgarian reported experiencing discrimination. No feelings of individual or group threat were indicated. Turks shared no feelings of threat but have often encountered discrimination at workplaces and university based on their ethnic belonging. Roma claimed to have experienced feelings of discrimination and threat due to their ethnic groups. One Roma shared to have felt marginalized in Bulgarian society through the constant feeling of being stigmatized and discriminated.

“I constantly feel marginalized. I am a normal person, who works and everything and I do think I work enough, but I feel it is not acknowledged as I am a Roma and people say it’s not true the work I do...”

The ethnic identification and self-perception did indicate tensions between the three ethnic groups as the representatives of all three groups shared different perceptions based on their ethnic belonging. Even though the majority of participants claimed to have neutral

or positive attitudes towards outgroups, manifestations of intolerance and scepticism could be observed especially towards the Roma. Five of the participants, of whom two Bulgarians and three Turks, expressed flagrant scepticism, mild negativity and fear towards the Roma community.

“They are a community of users who not only live in squalor everywhere but do not contribute with anything. I think they actually pose a threat to society as they are used to a primitive lifestyle – they are too impetuous”

Even though the majority of the participants claimed to hold neutral or positive attitudes towards their ethnic outgroups a general feeling of scepticism and prejudice could be observed towards the Roma from both Turks and Bulgarians.

“I am not saying I don't like Roma, but I can't like people who are not education. I can't like people who I do not consider pleasant and are not in my sphere and so on.”

All of the participants perceived a problem with the Roma community in relation to social cohesion in Bulgaria, elaborating that there was weak or medium cohesion when Roma were excluded. The reasoning for this varied. A substantial number of the participants claimed that the state has a responsibility to integrate the Roma by implementing better integration policies. Few participants linked this reasoning with the argument that the Roma are also not well accepted and marginalized by society. The majority of the participants agreed that there is an unequal attitude from the state towards the Roma group. Twelve participants suggested the Roma community is marginalized due to a lack of access to education, discrimination, unemployment and lack of effective integration

policies. Three participants even claimed that the Roma community is purposely repressed by the state.

On the contrary, six of participants argued that the Roma community receives more social support and benefits than the other two ethnic groups while refusing to integrate and contribute to Bulgarian society. In that sense both Bulgarians and Turks felt deprived from the state in comparison to the Roma community. Furthermore, all groups agreed that the Roma community perceives itself as relatively deprived. Overall, all participants indicated that there is a serious problem regarding the Roma community as they are poorly integrated into Bulgarian society. Whether it was argued that the state or the community itself bears responsibility, everyone agreed that the Roma community operates on the margins of society.

4.3. Micro-Individual Factors: The Need for Meaning and Religious Radicalisation in Bulgaria

On a micro level the majority of the participants were satisfied with their current socio-economic situation with only one participant feeling like the state provides enough assistance for achieving their goals. Three participants claimed to be unsatisfied with their current situation due to being unemployed. However, all participants shared to have set future goals and obtain feelings of motivation in order to fulfil them. Two Roma, one Turk and Bulgarian considered ethnicity to be influential for the achievement of their goals. The Turk and Bulgarian participants perceived ethnicity as positively influencing their desired goals, while the two Roma perceived the opposite. 13 participants declared that they will intervene if an outgroup is being verbally or physically abused in order to protect them.

Even though eight of the participants would justify unlawful means in order to achieve an objective, none of the participants indicated support for violence in this case. Moreover, all unlawful acts were justified within moral frames. For example, few participants claimed that they would pay extra in order to receive better medical care for them or their relatives due to concerns that bribes are a common practice in exchange for a better service. In the context of the current Syrian refugee crisis only two participants supposed that the border should be closed for refugees and asylum seekers. The other twelve believed that the border should be open, but appeal to the idea Bulgaria should be a transition country, indicating a sceptic attitude towards the settling of new outgroups. In terms of exerting sense of control over events all participants expressed desires to make a difference if not satisfied with the conditions provided by the state. Moreover, all participants expressed an inclination for mobilisation in the form of demonstration and expression of dissatisfaction without desires for revenge or violence against the state. In terms of self-worth the majority of the participants appeared to neither adopt a downward social comparison nor self-serving bias strategy in order to secure self-worth. Instead, the majority of the participants shared that they would experience discomfort and strive for equality when in a situation of unjustified pre-eminence. Moreover, in case of unjustified underestimation of their qualities the majority of the participants were inclined to first blame themselves and then external factors and triggers.

When discussing the phenomenon of radicalisation only two participants, of which one Turk and one Bulgarian, were informed about the aforementioned case of religious radicalisation in Pazardhizk. Even though the case against the one imam and his 13 followers has been in the media since 2010, no other participants were cognisant of it.

They had little information, or none at all. None of the participants felt threatened or concerned about the potential threat of religious radicalisation.

“For me, anyone who preaches whatever kind of radicalism is an insane person, to whom no attention should be paid. However, this should not be done through prohibitions, but just every adequately reasoning person will think “What kind of nonsense is this person saying?””

The majority of the participants felt that practicing Islam within its different branches should not be forbidden or looked upon with scepticism. However, many shared that even though there should be religious freedom, restrictions in terms of moral standards should be established *“as long as no one is hurt; I think there should be full freedom of religious interpretation, as long as there are no actions that are in contradiction with the existence of other people”*. Half of the participants felt like intervention from the state was necessary in order to cease the process of religious radicalisation, while the other half claimed that the state’s intervention is demonstration of power against Islamic religion and repression of Roma minority as the imam and his 13 followers are with Roma ethnicity.

5. Discussion

This section will present a discussion focusing on the results in relation to the Root Cause Model and the selected factors. Using the Root Cause Model, it was observed that the general perception of young people in relation to their socio-economic situation is negative which is significant considering the literature on youth pathways to radicalisation. The interviewees responses exhibit that youth in Bulgaria feel neglected and unsupported. Nonetheless, young people appear to be resilient and motivated to overcome those obstacles without necessarily being vulnerable to accumulating aggression, desiring to

disrupt the status quo, and therefore becoming susceptible to radicalisation. Within the context of ethnicity, however, a serious problem in relation to the Roma community was detected. However, this research has demonstrated that religion is not a causal factor, despite radicalisation regularly being cited as a Muslim or Islamic issue (Lakhani, 2013).

Young people feel frustrated with the given obstacles in gaining employment with the main one being the lack of opportunities for experience. However, feelings of demotivation were not indicated. Difficulties and uncertainties in relation to labour market integration did not appear to cause persistent anxiety as long as the interviewees' goals remained possible. Rather, Bulgarian youth feel they should rely on their own qualities, networks, and most of all, persistence. Moreover, within the context of the quest for meaning young people share feelings of satisfaction with their current socio-economic situation regardless of the difficulties posed by their socio-economic reality. These youth seemed to have set goals and desires to fulfil them, which is not in line with the arguments set forward by theories of radicalisation, such as feelings of alienation and accumulating aggression. However, the common opinion about the fact that Roma experience greater difficulties in terms of employment in comparison to the other two groups is also supported by already conducted research. Unemployment rates for the Roma are disproportionately high in comparison to the other two groups. Those with jobs are frequently in low-skilled, low income labour sectors as they face greater exclusion from other labour markets (Dimitrova & Vijver, 2014).

Education is devalued, perceived of low quality and considered unimportant in relation to integration. This poses a serious problem if education is considered the best

antidote for radicalisation. However, the problem with education does not appear to be only in implementing educational programs on the topic of radicalisation, but in relation to the full educational system. Even though there are quantitative achievements since 1989, higher education in Bulgaria still faces challenges in the areas of quality, accountability, finance, efficiency and outcomes (Danchev et al., 2012) The educational system requires revision and adjustment to the needs of students not only as a group of young people but also with consideration of the ethnic context. Turks reported to have been targets of discrimination however the Roma perceived issues in relation to discrimination and access as well. The system of “Gypsy schools,” where the students are predominantly or exclusively Roma children, creates a poor educational environment and, consequently, low-quality education. Many Roma children are simply not allowed to enrol in Bulgarian mainstream schools, and are instead channelled into overcrowded Roma schools (Dimitrova & Vijver, 2014).

Young people completely distrust the state and do not feel supported by the respective institutions. However, as a post-communist state Bulgaria obtains a legacy of distrust. During communism trust was irrelevant as the regime maintained expansive coercive power through fear and inertia (Rose, 1994). Various studies conducted since the fall of the communist regime indicate that the Bulgarian populace has become increasingly sceptical and critical towards the national political leaders and institutions (Boyadzhieva, 2009). Thus, it can be argued that young people were brought up within an environment of decreasing trust in the state. Therefore, the participants did not seem agitated by this lack of state support. They do not expect it, therefore do not feel shock or anger. Young people feel discontented with the state but this does not necessarily indicate the onset of

radicalisation. Moreover, even though interviewees show an inclination to act unlawfully in order to preserve their safety most participants do so within moral boundaries of non-violence. As moral disengagement was not observed it can be established that the young people have a clear understanding of moral boundaries and do not experience a desire for violence in order to forcefully or radically establish the actualisation of their quest for meaning. These observed moral limits relate positively with their sense of efficacy and desire to control life situations. Moreover, the Bulgarian youth did not feel the urge to secure self-worth through feeling of superiority or self-serving bias. Instead, young people expressed desires for equality and justice. However, when looking through the prism of ethnicity feelings of relative deprivation between the Roma and the other two groups were observed. The significant amount of policy documents targeting Roma, the public discussions on the topic as well as the governmental and international commitments constructed the impression that the Roma minority takes central place in public policy. This provoked a public backlash against the minority and encouraged the other groups to perceive Roma as privileged. However, “at the same time real government action for the implementation of Roma integration policies was sporadic, uncoordinated and underfunded, leading to perceptions of ethnic mistrust that are unfounded” (Danova, 2015, p.5).

Taking into consideration the factors that have been observed through the Root Cause Model it seems young people are not content with their society. Yet, they are able to rely on their abilities and motivations to fulfil their goals and needs to a satisfactory level. Therefore, they do not accumulate aggressive desires to change the status quo. This indicates that these youths are not in the cognitive phase of the process of radicalisation.

However, the given perceptions of social conditions in Bulgaria do indicate the potential for cognitive radicalisation if their concerns about the labour market, lack of state support and ineffectiveness of education are not resolved. However, the perpetual marginalisation of the Roma community has been confirmed and perceived by all interviewees, which is one of the most important findings of this research in relation to the process of radicalisation.

Marginalization of Roma has been documented in various reports and research, but never through the lenses of radicalisation. Considering the only case of religious radicalisation in Bulgaria occurred amongst the Roma community, it is surprising that no empirical research has been conducted on the topic yet even though the threat of radicalisation is included in the National Strategy for the Integration of the Roma minority (Bulgarian Government. 2012 – 2020).

6. Conclusion

This research hoped to investigate whether young people's perceptions about their socio-economic situation can be related to the process of radicalisation. An attempt to capture a pre-phase of radicalisation through investigating the perceptions of young people was made. The manifold research that was conducted demonstrated that attempting to analyse and capture a pre-phase of radicalisation is particularly complex and challenging given the depth of the socio-economic concerns raised. There are certain limitations that are worth mentioning such as the small number of participants in this study, which makes the sample not fully representative of Bulgarian youth. Furthermore, not all factors that could be related to radicalisation are included in this research due to space limitations. The

research could also focus on factors beyond what is selected in this study that are also relevant.

Nonetheless, the study was unique in attempting to observe the phenomenon of radicalisation in its pre-phase through the conceptualisation of the participants' perceptions. The idea that the perceptions of young people could be used as an object of research in this field, as opposed to focusing on only empirical facts, is innovative as it generates data that can prevent the onset of radicalisation from the perspective of Bulgarian youth themselves. It is not clear whether the results obtained, particularly the nuanced ways in which Bulgarian youth manage their socio-economic situation and discontent, would have been given if their perceptions were not given voice. By observing young Bulgarians perceptions about their current socio-economic situation on macro and micro level in relation to the process of radicalisation the study located relevant issues that require further research and attention. Even though young people do not appear to be at the onset of radicalisation this should not serve as a justification for neglecting the aforementioned issues in the areas of education, distrust and employment. Instead this research should serve as motivation for policy revision and intervention plans. Moreover, it should also alert policymakers towards a growing problem in relation to the marginalisation of Roma communities which can contribute to an increased vulnerability to radicalisation.

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Appendix I

Table 1. Operationalisation of concepts

| Theoretical Concept/ Topic | Operationalisation |
|--|---|
| Demographics | Name Age Gender Level of Education Employed/Not Employed |
| Macro-Level Factors: 1. Unemployment 2. Education 3. Trust/Distrust 4. Poverty | 1. Access to labour market 1. Impediments when looking for employment 1. Factors influencing employment integration (religion/ethnicity/experience/education) 2. Meaning of education for socio-economic integration. 2. Access to education 2. Factors for access to education (religion/ethnicity) 3. Evaluation of social support/policies for young people 3. Desired policy/support changes 3. Political representation 3. Unlawful behaviour |

| | |
|---|--|
| | <p>4. Satisfaction with level of payment</p> <p>4. Economically disadvantaged social groups</p> |
| <p>Micro-Social Factors:</p> <p>1. Self-categorization and social identity</p> <p>2. Relative deprivation</p> | <p>1. Religious/Ethnic Identification</p> <p>1. Importance of group identification</p> <p>1. Influence of belonging</p> <p>1. Attitude towards ethnic/religious out-groups</p> <p>2. Disadvantaged Social Groups</p> <p>2. Evaluation of government's attitude</p> |
| <p>Micro-Individual Factors:</p> <p>1. Purpose</p> <p>2. Value</p> <p>3. Efficacy</p> <p>4. Self-Worth</p> | <p>1. Satisfaction with current individual situation</p> <p>1. Evaluation of government's support</p> <p>2. Religious/Ethnic Identification</p> <p>2. Inclination for aggressive behaviour</p> <p>3. Desire for control</p> <p>4. Comparison to others</p> |
| Religious Radicalism in Bulgaria | Attitude towards teachings of radical Islam |

Table 2. Coding Tree

