



**TARGETING
EXTREMISM
AND
CONSPIRACY
THEORIES**

Relevant Conspiracy Theories
in Bulgaria
National Report



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1. Definition and discourse on conspiracy theories

The conspiracy theories have not been at the focus of research in Bulgaria. Generally accepted is the position that in conspiracy theories the events are explained as (at least partially) dedicated activities, that had been planned and realized by a few people in a secret for the general public manner (Venkov, 2014, 2016). One of the functions of the conspiracy theories is to declare the social criticism by those who have no authoritative public position. This is the opposition of the masses, who are deprived from the chance to declare “truths” about themselves. This makes them approach tools and search for ways how to undermine the imposed rules and senses, which deprive them from freedom of expression. The suggestion is that conspiracy theories are often defined as narratives that explain an unfavorable state of affairs by the covert, concerted, and intentional actions of a powerful group (Hristov, 2017).

Specific is the operationalization – between conspiracy theories and conspiracy plots as a “short form” of demonstrated conspirative thinking. The conclusion is that not the plot is conspirative, but the way it is formulated (Venkov, 2017). In this line is the conclusion about the common attitudes towards the government institutions – they are mystified, regarded as having unlimited power to control the economic, demographic, and cultural dynamics. This results in disappointment and loss of confidence when nothing positive happens because of the expectation government to solve all problems. If problems persist, this is perceived as intentional act of omission of act.

Another discourse is in rhetoric aspect – the three aspects of definition, persuasiveness and key psychological features, explaining why different groups are more or less vulnerable. Conspirative theories are considered mostly sensational, unverified, based on absolute intention, supporting exclusive vile disposition, usually lacking evidence and being self-sufficient (Petrova, 2019).

In psychological aspect on individual level is suggested also the coping behaviour – sharing conspiracy beliefs can be selective when there is no other effective defensive

mechanism, explaining why dominating predictor is the event or the situation, but not personal disposition, education or other factors (Bakracheva & Totseva, 2018).

It can be summarized that there is a large discrepancy between the research of the conspiracy theories (just a few scientific studies, eg. Marinov, 2016) and the large body of popular titles by Bulgarian authors, distributed on the market, revealing the interest (more than 30 very popular titles, eg. Galabov, 2001; Nikolov, 1993a, 1993b; 1996; Palushev, 2008; Boyadzhiiski, 2018).

In conclusion, in scientific research is supported the position that in Bulgaria raise of conspiracy beliefs is strongly related to the real environment and trends (Hristov, 2017, Bakracheva & Totseva, 2018).

In Bulgaria there are just a few studies on general superstitions (Friday, 13th, Black cat, etc.) and some conspiracy beliefs on world level (Chemtrails), but not on nationally specific topics. Within the broader framework of research of other phenomena we can suggest that sharing conspiracy beliefs for Bulgarians is not „in general“, but concerning issues that really make people search for answers.

We can relate sharing the conspiracy theories to two main groups that unite them based on the motivation, underlying their sharing. The first group relates to personal (and of the close people) health and security (vaccines, Chemtrails), and the second group, represented in particular nationally significant or world significant events of national impact (genocide against the Bulgarians).

The two groups are based on these two lines of sharing the world conspiracy, represented most of all in national facts.

Valid are the basic four axioms:

Axiom 1: Nothing is occasional. If something seems to be occasional, then it is even more suspicious because someone tries to mask the goals and targets of the secret power and its plans.

Axiom 2: Everything is conspiracy. The politics is just a plot. There is no publicity and transparency. This, however, is clear just for the few initiated, who have the key to understand the events.

Axiom 3: All people are manipulated. We are victims of global PR and political technologies that imprint in our unconsciousness false slogans, making people react. Reference "Red garbage".

Axiom 4: There are hidden puppeteers. The threads are pulled by transatlantic secret centres and people eg. George Soros, bidelbergers and rockfellers, who, c/o secret and intelligent services, world media and networks of NGOs, form and change the governments, giving secret passwords at the right time.

The most shared theories according to sectional studies:

- 20% of Bulgarians consider vaccines are dangerous and a part of the world plot and conspiracy.
- 14 % of the Bulgarians consider vaccines can cause / led to autism – this means that 770 000 Bulgarians share this opinion. 35% consider vaccines can lead / cause allergies that means about 2 mln. people.
- 40% of Bulgarians think that there is a secret society that rules the world
- More than 60% consider the diseases are artificially spread
- 66% of people share the opinion that diseases are artificially generated for the purpose pharmaceuticals and drugs to be sold
- 40% share the belief of secret society ruling the world; 2
- 5% believe in Chemtrails and 24% in the climate weapon HAARP

All the remaining issues relate to superstitions, that are out of the scope of the project, which however, are widely spread mainly as coping mechanisms.

2. Media

The observation and investigation are based on 25 media in Bulgaria: televisions, online media and site of traditional media. The corpus includes 115 publications, video clips of TV media broadcasts, as well as video lectures typed during the real event of as a part of TV programs.

Preferable topics in connection with conspiracy theories are in five groups:

1. Secret plans for the destruction of Bulgaria and Plan Ran: Relates to the economy strategy for the development of the Republic of Bulgaria. The conspiracy theory includes the information about decreases the population of Bulgaria, low standard and quality of life, migration, changes in the population (Bulgarian ethnic majority and majorities tec.). The second thesis is that there is a plot for the destroying of Bulgaria on economic, cultural and social levels. The main second is that the internal policy of Bulgaria is prepared preliminary with participation of Bulgarian experts.

2. Secret society and ruling of the world. The subtopics are Masons, Templars, Rosicrucians, Rotary Club, Illuminati, etc. The conspiracy theory includes the topics about the roles of Masons in the modern Bulgarian society and the claim is that the members of the secret society prepare preliminary suggestions in connection with Bulgarian economy and culture and that masons and Templars play key roles in policy, as well as Spin doctors. Media inform about the history of Masons in Bulgaria and the present facts from history about Bulgarian politicians and statesmen as proofs that they continue to impact during the civil society.

3. Secret weapons created in different regions of the world: USA, Russia, etc. The themes of secret weapons, produced by major nations, are a continuation of the Cold War era and the opposition of the two great powers, the United States and Russia. The conspiracy theory about samples with different types of weapons was active during the war in the former Yugoslavia, a neighbouring country of Bulgaria. The media writes about fire-arms, missiles and other weapons. This conspiracy theory has no lasting presence in the media in Bulgaria.

4. Secret plans to kill people through drugs and vaccines: The topics are presented in Bulgarian media, but they do not have a permanent presence in media publications and TV broadcasts. Topics are activated when it comes to importing vaccines from Turkey, their quality, vaccine damage, and protests from parent and patient organizations about vaccines and children. The issue of AIDS, viruses and strains and infecting people for the sake of not being healthy also appears in the media, but there is no lasting presence.

5. Secrets related to the history of Bulgaria and its contribution to world history and civilization: Thracians, Cathars, Albigensians, Bogomils: Historical topics have connection with Ancient and Medieval history of Bulgaria. The subtopics has connection with the role of the Bogomils and their influence in European civilization through Cathars and Albigensians. The topics are presented in TV shows and video lectures. The second subtopic has connection with Thracians, their philosophy and mysticism as well as their influence in history. The topic relate to Ludmila Givkova, Strandja Mountain and connection with King Solomon, Egypt, Basat (Woman Kate) etc. The second subtopic has connection with the conspiracy theory is that the contribution of Bulgaria's cultural heritage to Europe and the world by certain countries and circles is not appreciated. The next has links with the role of representative from different civilization/extra-terrestrials, for example the excavations of military and scientists near the village of Tsalapitsa in order to open a connection with secrets.



3. Prevalent conspiracy theories in adult education.

Three adult trainers who live and work in three different regions of the country were interviewed for the purpose of the project.

RM1B is the manager of a Vocational Training Center in the town of Silistra in Northeastern Bulgaria. The Center employs 15 trainers on temporary contracts. He is also an adult trainer who enrol in courses for driving licenses.

According to him, the topic of illegal enrichment of the ruling in Bulgaria is most often discussed during the training and informal talks. The topic is expanding with the problems of corruption that has been spreading among the government in the last 10-15 years and people give many examples of this. They go back and talk about the looting of the state after 1989, when the Bulgarian Communist Party lost its dominant position.

According to KG, the people he meets in his work are poor and interested in their survival, and the well-being achieved through dishonesty bothers them.

The second interviewee is Eng. OF2B. She is the manager of a Vocational Training Center in the city of Sofia, which is called the National Association for Vocational Education ABC. The Center organizes computer literacy trainings at various levels, both initially and in working with different kind of software and also how to develop software.

In the context of the issue about the conspiracy theories, according to OF2B, the main topics discussed are related to the Internet. Adult learners comment on the veracity of information disseminated on the web and many are convinced that everything is a lie. They believe that they are victims of total manipulation and that the information is the result of gossip and untruths "One woman said".

Another frequently discussed topic is that access to Facebook will be paid. The third is that we are all monitored on the web and conspiracies are all around us.

Fourth, that the "Dark web" is much larger than the visible network and that it is used for prostitution, pornography and drug trafficking. Fifth place discusses fake news and the inability to trace their source and originator. People consider this a threat.

They are afraid of invading their personal space and misusing their funds because of receiving counterfeit emails from banks where they have accounts to provide personal information.

The third interviewee is IM3B, who is a lecturer at South-West University "Neofit Rilski" in Blagoevgrad, Southwestern Bulgaria. N. Ts. is taking courses to improve the qualifications of teachers in the use of information technology in the educational process. He is a trainer in several organizations – Center for Continuing Education at SWU "Neofit Rilski", RAABE - Sofia, Euro class Consult from the city of Plovdiv. IM3B gives his opinion on the conspiracy theories he encounters as a person in his daily life and which are discussed with teachers from all over the country with whom he works: In the first area, according to him: The main fake news, which also implies some element of conspiracy, is related to the interpretation of the basic normative documents and they are the basis for creating conspiracy and fabrication of fake news.

In public area, the level of media competence and everything that is published in the media space is very often unchecked - a media promotes a news story without providing evidence of its truth and credibility, and if it is false without being checked, it is multiplied by everyone other media repeatedly.

When working with adults in the course of education, topics related to conspiracy theories are discussed and, in his opinion, adults are quite critical of the information presented and question it in the course of training, and sources from which they receive information in their professional work sometimes make them suspicious. They are extremely critical and believe that some of the information they receive is the result of some conspiracy and intent that would direct attention in another direction and divert it from real problems. Conspiracy theories make people move away from the present / life and make them believe in other things.

According to him: Bulgarians most often believe in the quick success and that the state is to blame for everything.

4. Summary

- There are just a few research articles. Occasionally “conspiracy”, “plots” and “conspiracy theories” are mentioned in line with other concepts. At the same time there are a lot of books on Conspiracy, distributed on the market. This is an evidence of the national specificity – the need and search of explanations, which, however, is out of the scientific focus. There is a difference between the few studied subjects and the most popular in media topics. Our research reveal the topic of genocide, which had never been discussed in research. Research up to now is limited to general superstitions and vaccines
- The explanation, given in the small body of research, is that conspiracy beliefs are related to feeling of powerless or disadvantage position, particularly in terms of crisis or lack of information or when the information is not reliable. No one of the topics is persisting in the media all the time.
- The dominating shared categories of beliefs in Bulgaria are Genocide against the nation – direct and economic impact, reducing the number of the population
 - Health and safety related threats as a part of the world plot
 - Both nation genocide and dissemination of diseases are under the umbrella of the World Plot and the secret society, ruling the world
- The reason Bulgarian to share conspiracy theories is:
 - The imposed need to find answers
 - Clues or serious grounds, on which beliefs are laid and by which they are supported.
- Reasons, contributing to sharing conspiracy theory of genocide, is the image of the “Bulgarians”, described in cross-cultural studies in European and world surveys, describing us as the poorest; taking one of the first levels in respect of corruption; one of the countries with lowest freedom of speech;

unhappiest nation; the most complaining nation; intolerant; and what most is related to conspiracy beliefs - with low confidence in institutions (national, European) and media. In support of the shared theory of genocide against Bulgarians is also the fact that Bulgaria is the oldest country in Europe having the most ancient and exact calendar, but these facts are not included in the textbooks. This makes the theory the only explanatory model. In other words, shared beliefs are based on discrepancy in facts and when this is adaptive for the individual explanation, but not searched per se.



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