

**Abstract**

**Lilia Raycheva**

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## **Populist Political Communication in the Bulgarian Media Ecosystem**

Digitization poses significant transformations in contemporary media ecosystem. As positive as the impact if ICT might be on progress in all areas of life, it is no less important that they pose significant social challenges. Having in mind the rapid developments of the information and communication technologies in a highly competitive market, a major concern is whether the pillars of the European media model (freedom of expression and access to information, cultural diversity, consumer protection, and media pluralism, intolerance for racial and religious hatred) can be efficiently sustained.

Populism as a political position and rhetorical style is nowadays an object of multi-faceted academic debates. The strong critical attitude of populists towards what they regard as the chimera of democracy, is generally intertwined with the function of the media as a corrective factor with regard to government authorities. Besides, the challenges of the economic crisis, as well as the migration processes are strengthening the positions of the Euro-skeptics and revitalize the development of populism. The political environment in Bulgaria is characterized by almost permanent merge of political entities, which gradually escalates the use of populist approaches, styles and rhetoric. A steady tendency towards politicization of the media and mediatization of politics is observed, especially in the performances of some populist entities which bases are rooted in media.

The aim of the proposed paper is two-folded: firstly, to examine the challenges to the media ecosystem; secondly, to present the results of a study on populist political performances reflected in the Bulgarian media. The paper is developed within the framework of two COST Actions: IS 1308: Populist Political Communication in Europe and CA 16211: Reappraising Intellectual Debates on Civic Rights and Democracy in Europe. The research is supported by the National Science Fund of Bulgaria research projects D COST 01-02/17.05.2017 and D COST 01-25/20.12.2017.

Key words: media ecosystem, populist political communication, digitization