

A NATIONALIST - CONSERVATIVE GRAMMAR OF CHANGE

*How nationalist political discourses
articulate the notion of change in Bulgaria*



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THE ORIGINS OF A CASE STUDY: VÄZRABHDANE



POST-DEMOCRACY

Post-democratic, clientelist and otherwise corrupt practices define Bulgaria's political regime.

Civil society – especially its 'uncivil' forms – are kept in contempt by both political elites and mainstream media.

(Krasteva 2019; Coalition 2000 2003; Benovska-Sabkova 2015; Price 2019; Telaarico 2021g)



HUNGER FOR CHANGE

Historically, bottom-up movements have been neutralised by the inertia of dominant political culture

But decades of stagnating living standards and recent scandals mined the legitimacy of current elites making the opportunity structure more favourable to outsiders ready to 'shake things up'

(Sztompka 1993; McFalls 1995; Ådnanes 2007; Telaarico 2021a, 100–102; 2021c; 2021e; 2021f)



THE NEWCOMERS

Thanks to the protests that shook the country from Summer 2020 to Spring 2021, term 'change' has become ubiquitous in Bulgarian political discourse.

Expressing those grievances, Văzrazhdane claims to seek 'change' while advancing a 'conservative' and 'patriotic' agenda.

(Kodzhaivanova 2021; Petkov 2021; Kostadinov 2021a; 2021b)

02. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK / PART 1: POLITICS & DISCOURSE

POWER AND THE ROLE OF WORDS

In the 20th century Michael **Foucault** (e.g., [1969] 2005; [1971] 2009) dedicated much attention to the intermingling of language and politics. He considered **linguistic practices** as connected to extant **power relations**: either **reproducing or challenging** them.

This conceptualisation inspired applied linguistics (Chomsky and McChesney 1999), critical linguistics (see Fowler et al. [1979] 2018), eventually leading to the formalisation of **Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)**.



02. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK / PART 1: POLITICS & DISCOURSE

THE WORDS OF POWER & THE POWER OF WORDS



WHAT IS CDA?

CDA is analysis of the *dialectical relationships* between *discourse* [...] and other elements of *social practices*. [...] Discourse figures [...] as a part of the social activity within a practice [..., as] a *process of social construction* of practices, including reflexive self-construction [...] and] in ways of being, in the *constitution of identities* – for instance the *identity of a political leader* [...] is *partly a discursively constituted way of being*.
(Fairclough 2003, 205–6)



DISCOURSE IN CDA

CDA interprets Foucault's idea of discourse as

a cluster of context-dependent semiotic practices often expressing validity claims and always situated within specific fields of social action which are socially constituted and socially constitutive.

(Reisigl and Wodak 2009, 87)

02. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK / PART 1: POLITICS & DISCOURSE

THE WORDS OF POLITICS: DEFINING POLITICAL DISCOURSE



AS THE PRODUCT OF A PROFESSION

The “*discourse produced by professional politicians*” (Simpson and Mayr 2010, 42) and **political institutions** (Chilton 2004, 16–29, chap. 2)

Also, the language practices of

the group of people who are being paid for their (political) activities, and who are being elected or appointed (or self-designated) as the central players in the polity

(van Dijk 1997, 13)



02. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK / PART 1: POLITICS & DISCOURSE

FROM WORDS TO (F)ACT: POLITICAL DISCOURSE AND ACTION



POLITICAL DISCOURSE AS FORM OF POLITICAL ACTION

Insofar as it is both complements other social activities and manifests its own socially constitutive power, a political-discursive practice is quite indistinguishable from a material action (it is a *speech act* - cf. Austin 1975).

Practically, its ability to alter social reality directly (Pateman 1976; Fowler et al. [1979] 2018, 185–213) “blurs the distinction between talk and action” (Gastil 1992, 479).

For instance, asserting the need for and reprimanding opposition to change constitutes already an attempt to bring about the change which the speech act evokes and, thus, enacts.



02. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK / PART 2: THE POLITICAL RIGHT

(MIS)UNDERSTANDING THE POLITICAL RIGHT



THE 'RIGHT' STIZZ ON THE RISE?

Political subjectivities, especially parties, labelled or self-defining as 'rightist' have been considered "on the rise" in West Europe since at least the 1990s (Beyme 1988; Betz 1993; 1994).

Ever since, there has been a proliferation of studies on the political right — especially within the 'boom' of the literature on "populism" (cf. Colliot-Thélène 2020 for a critical appraisal).



AN INTELLECTUAL DISARMAMENT

Most of the theories produced in the last 50–70 years are unsatisfactory insofar as they were bred within a "**hegemonic**" formation (Zipp and Fenwick 2006) in which **almost everyone** shares the same, so-called '**liberal**' **ideas** called *academia* (Gross and Fosse 2012; Solon 2015; Flaherty 2016).

Thus, "support to radical right-wing parties [...] *contradicts several of the core hypotheses of postwar political sociology.*" (Rydgren 2007, 242).

02. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK / PART 2: THE POLITICAL RIGHT

DICHOTOMIES OF THE POLITICAL RIGHT



TRADITIONAL VIEWS

Dichotomy between parties and movements in favour of change (associated with the left or centre-left area) and rightist oppositions on strictly classist bases.



"CULTURALIST INTERPRETATIONS"

Rightists react to leftists' initiatives by starting a counter-mobilisation (see Kováts 2018 for a constructive criticism). Essentially, rightists act "on behalf of relatively advantaged groups with the goal of preserving, restoring and expanding the rights and privileges of its members and constituents" (McVeigh 2009, 32). Hence, they are assumed to support "existing political power structures" whereas left-wingers have an "antagonistic relationships" with the latter (Kincaid 2017, 1).



REACTIONARIES EVERYWHERE!

Thus, rightist activists and constituents receive regular diagnoses of false consciousness (e.g. Frankel 2015; Nowicka-Franczak 2021) or are assumed to be "leftists from the right" (e.g., Schüddekopf 1960 on Nazism). Consequently, attempts to bring about change – or start a revolution – from the right take the negative/reactive connotation of "counter-revolution" (Mohler [1932] 2005; Weber 2004).

02. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK | PART 2: THE POLITICAL RIGHT

THE RIGHT'S RELIGIOUS IMPERATIVE: *REVOLUTION!*

These views forget that the “*religious imperative*” (as Gallagher 1997 has it) to revolutionise is a **central tenant** of **rightists’ self-representation**.

The **radical right** has **historically** represented itself as a **force for change**, and even perceived itself as proactively revolutionary (cf. Ivaldi 1996; Lapp 1997; see also D’Orsi 1985; and Gagliardi 2016 on Italian fascism).

And no case made this **revolutionary thrust** more bluntly evident than **Nazism** as both **defectors** and **historians** acknowledged.



According to an early defector of the Third Reich:

[Nazism's] extreme application of the methods of technology to political and social life had certainly nothing conservative about it. It was radically revolutionary, and aimed at the removal of the last vestiges of a tradition and of historic continuity.

(Rauschning [1941] 2004, 44 and 47)

According to Jewish historian George Mosse:

[the appeal of rightist means and ideas of the revolution]
cannot be understood if we see it merely in negative terms
[...]. *For millions it did satisfy a deeply-felt need for activism*
combined with identification, it seemed to embody their vision of
a classless society. [...] Bourgeois youth streamed into its ranks
because to them it seemed to offer a positive solution to the
problems of [...] society.

(Mosse 1966, 25)

THE RIGHT IN EASTERN EUROPE

The “*right in Eastern Europe looks very different*” (Hockenos 2013, 8ff) because post-socialist ‘rightist’ and ‘leftist’ are not defined by their ‘reactive’ or ‘active’ stance towards social change. Arguably, as it is the case in France (cf. Ivaldi 1996, 357ff), all radicalism (leftist and rightist) is “*manifestations of a broad culture of revolution and radicalism*”.

Eastern Europe’s *culture of revolution* emerged in the early-20th century, when “*all existing political institutions were to be abolished and founded anew*” (Mosse 1966, 25) to establish a new nation State (e.g., Poland, Baltics) and/or build a real-socialist society (USSR).

Anti-Ceausescu protestors



Romanian revolutionaries
(Early 1990s)



Polish statesman
(interwar period)



Pravyy Sektor

Ukrainian revolutionaries
(2010s-Today)

03. DATA & METHODS/ PART 1: METHODS

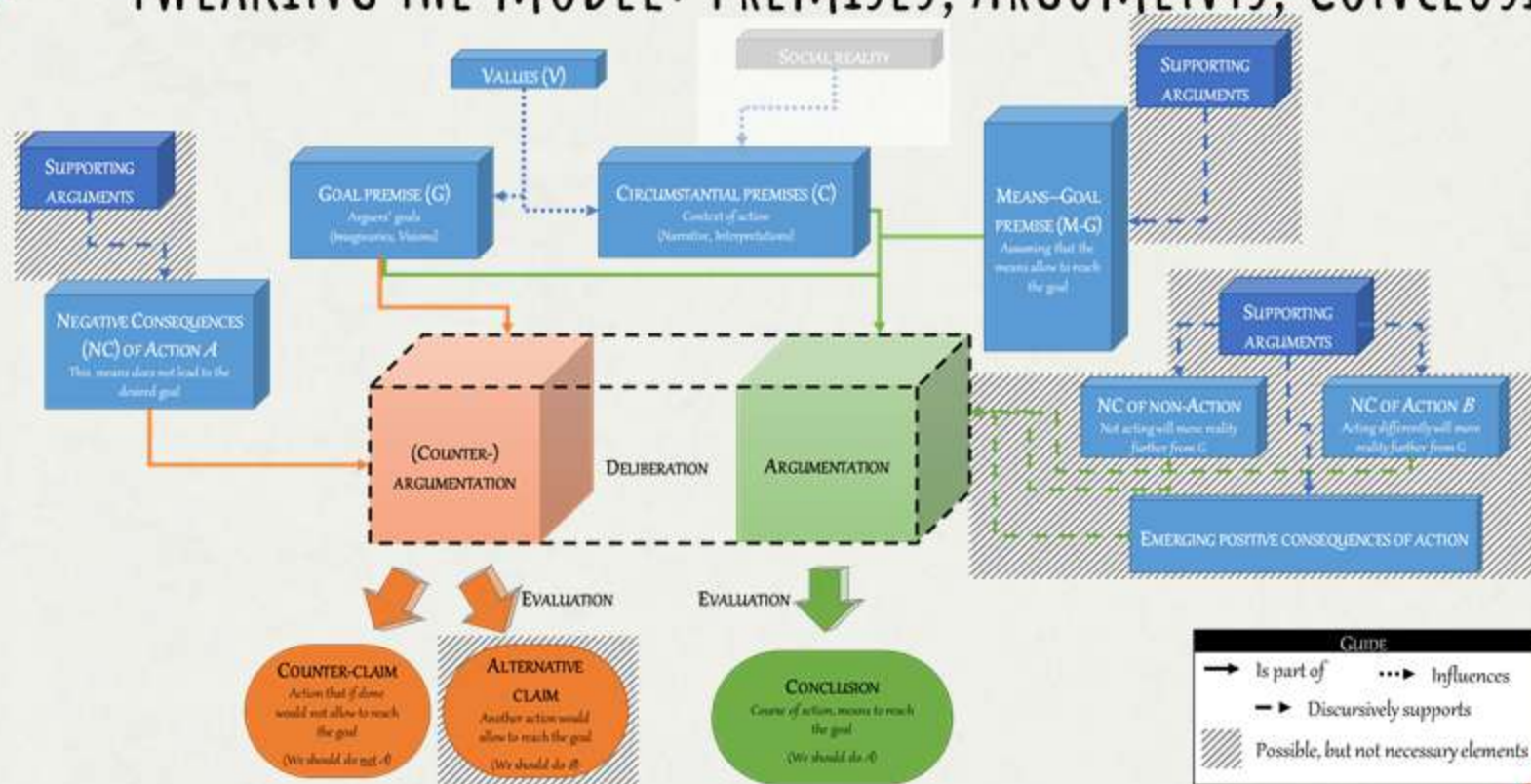
POLITICAL DISCOURSE AS PRACTICAL REASONING

The framework proposed in *Political Discourse Analysis* by Isabela and Norman Fairclough (2012) sees **politics** as the **making choices** about **how to act** in **response** to given **circumstances** and in **light of certain goals and values**. Ultimately, it conceptualizes political discourse as a form of premise-conclusion **practical reasoning** (Fairclough and Fairclough 2012, 11).

Evidently, this methodology holds also if there is no sincere exchange of information and arguments and even if best argued conclusion is not the one informing political action. Instead, it is **sufficient** that **some sort of argumentations about choices** “that are up to us and are matters of action” takes place; **even if it was just one person** doing all the reasoning (Aristotle [335-322 BCE] 1961, bk. 3, 1112a 32 and cf. also 1113a-1113b).

03. DATA & METHODS/ PART 1: METHODS

TWEAKING THE MODEL: PREMISES, ARGUMENTS, CONCLUSION

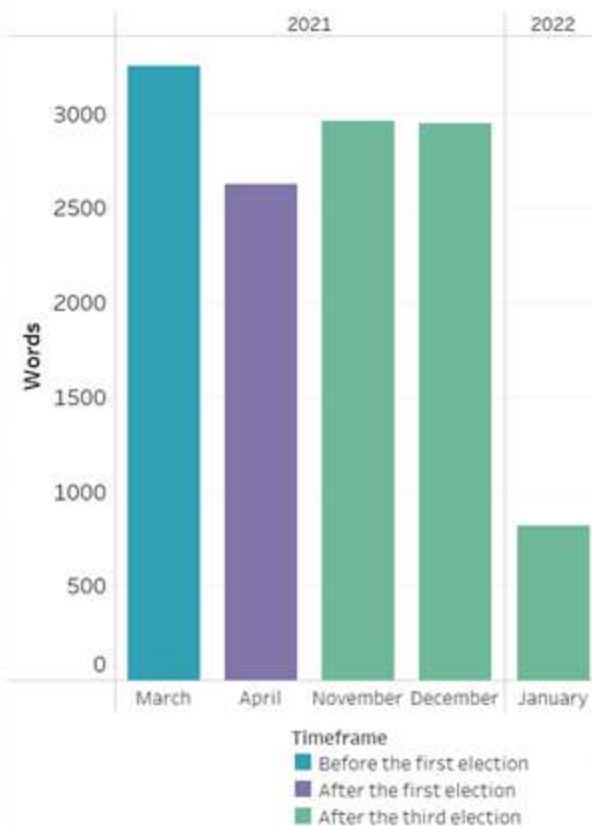


03. DATA & METHODS I

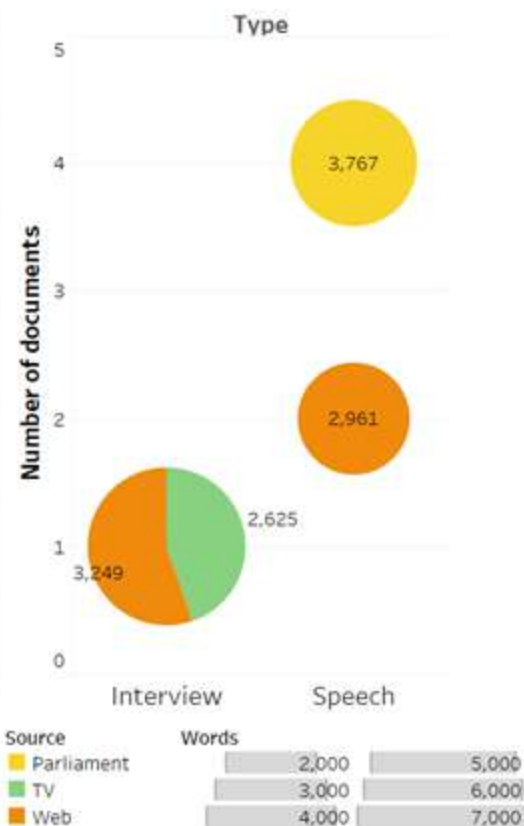
PART 2: DATA WHAT & WHEN

The analysis is based on the over 12,000 word-long transcripts of eight videos available on the social media channels of Văzrazhdane's leader, Kostadin Konstadinov.

(Panel A) Temporal distribution of the documents



(Panel B) Number of words and number of documents in relation to their type and source



04. ANALYSIS / PART 1: QUALITATIVE METHODS

QUALITATIVE & QUANTITATIVE ANALYSES

Mixed methods: (Qualitative) CDA by combining the traditional focus on grammar, syntax, lexicon, intertextuality and inter-discursivity (Fairclough 1995; 2003) with a special attention to metaphors (Lakoff and Johnson [1980] 2003; Ferrari 2007); (Quantitative) Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDS) in the programming language R (R Core Team [1997] 2021)



QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS.

The two interviews (Text № 1 and 2) are considered separately by both identifying the components of its premise-conclusion deliberation and analysing grammatical and linguistic features of the text according to a CDA techniques.



QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS.

All the text are treated as a corpus allowing for the identification of linguistic patterns via the use of CAQDAS techniques.

04. ANALYSIS / PART 1: QUALITATIVE METHODS

GENERAL REMARKS ON KOSTADINOV'S TWO INTERVIEWS

Deliberation processes are usually well pronounced in interviews, which allow much attention to possible counter- and alternative argumentations

Kostadinov's two interviews (text № 1–2) share the conclusion: “We need to vote for Văzrazhdane” and several alternative claims (“Vote for another party” and “Do not vote at all”).

The texts show a well-developed deliberative structure and justify the conclusion by referring to the notion of change: *[b]ecause there is no one else and because **only we can** change the status quo* (text № 1, line 234). Moreover, he shows confidence in the soundness of his argumentations by stating that *“the voters, already seeing the real alternative in Vazrazhdane”* (№ 2, 138–9) will increasingly support it.

04. ANALYSIS | PART 1: QUALITATIVE METHODS

TEXT № 1 - CIRCUMSTANTIAL PREMISE



Kostadinov's description of the current state of affairs in Bulgaria is rather bleak — and in line with that of other rightist forces.

Namely, he describes the “governing model, which is currently based on a type of Euro-Atlantic compromise” as “not just totally exhausted”, but “*harmful for Bulgaria*” because NATO and EU “partners [...] behave like overlords” (№ 1, 39–43). He continued saying that “at the moment we see that the Bulgarian national interest is practically absent” (63–4).

04. ANALYSIS / PART 1: QUALITATIVE METHODS

TEXT N° 1 – MEAN-GOALS AND GOALS PREMISES

Kostadinov formulates a clear means-goal premise to argue that voting for *Văzrazhdane* is at the very least necessary to achieve several goals, the most important of which is the ideal form of government: a “*be free, independent, united and prosperous*” Bulgaria (lines 33–4).

Discursively, the M-G premise is supported two “**strategic functions**” of language in **political discourse** (Chilton and Schäffner 1997, 211–215; Chilton 2004, 45–47):

- **negative representation of other** political subjects (which constitutes also a part of the negative consequences of the alternative claim) by saying that they “*prefer to ... prefer to just do nothing, believing that nothing can change.*” (line 10).
- **positive self-representation** based on the idea that “*we are different from those who deceived*” (line 9) because “[w]e *think that everything can change*” (line 11).

04. ANALYSIS / PART 1: QUALITATIVE METHODS

TEXT Nº 1 – VALUES

At first sight, the values that Kostadinov claims for Văzrazhdane seem rather backward-looking, fitting the traditional description of the political right as a reactionary and reactive actor: the ideal of the 19th-century “Bulgarian Revival” (line 35), equality (30–31), family (3, 111–4, 136–40) and an unspecified self-identification as a “conservative organisation” (line 161).

However, the value most often remarked by Kostadinov reveals a much more future-oriented perspective and a strong advocacy for Bulgarians to start working to change both their life (henceforth: ‘inward change’) and Bulgarian society (hence: ‘outward change’). In a word, this tension could be well summarised under the Nietzschean label “will to power” (*Wille zur Macht*).

04. ANALYSIS / PART 1: QUALITATIVE METHODS

TEXT N° 1 – VALUES

Discursively, this is presented in multiple ways and using some very articulated metaphors.

For instance, Kostadinov he utters a deeply emotional encomium of willpower by remarking even though many *“are disillusioned with what is happening in the country and deceived and lied to in their hopes”* (lines 6–7), individuals remain capable of inward and outward change: *“our battle is precisely this, to make the Bulgarian people believe in themselves again. Because if we believe in ourselves nothing can stop us.”* (lines 15–16).

Also, he reinforces the necessity of being strong-willed by using the metaphor of ‘politics as a fight’: *“It’s not shameful to be beaten by someone stronger — shameful it’s only to run away”* (lines 227–8). This fight-themed metaphor frames politics in “stereotypically masculine ways as battles, sporting events or back street brawls” (Gidengil and Everitt 2003, 561).

04. ANALYSIS | PART 1: QUALITATIVE METHODS

TEXT № 1 – VALUES

Another key metaphor in building Kostadinov's strongly voluntaristic view of history is that *history as a bicycle*: *"There are no impossible things. Impossible things do not exist in history! [...] Well, it was impossible for the Soviet Union to collapse [...]; it was impossible for Yugoslavia, one of the most prosperous countries in Europe, to break up and for 500,000 people to die there in a bloody civil war [...]. It was impossible to have a state of emergency and to be fined 5,000 leva for not wearing a mask in the streets [...] history is a bicycle – It is driven by people who have clearly set goals, visions, dreams and messages. If you want to be a subject you ride the bicycle. If you want to be an object the bicycle passes over you."*

The exaltation of the *Will fur Macht* builds upon a combination of claims based on Kostadinov's personal expertise as a historian and PhD in ethnography and authoritative intellectuals from the past. Including direct quotes of leftist like the poets Geo Milev (on his life see Kāshta Muzey 'Geo Milev' 2021) and Radion Ralyn.

04. ANALYSIS / PART 1: QUALITATIVE METHODS

TEXT Nº 2 - CIRCUMSTANTIAL & GOAL PREMISES

The circumstantial premise is quite similar to that of text Nº 1.

Six goal premises (in reverse order of relevance):

- stopping *“the demographic catastrophe”* (lines, 166–8);
- reversing the transformation of Bulgarian education into *“a system creating an amorphous mass without national self-consciousness”* (175–80);
- *“overcoming the healthcare crisis”* (169–70) caused by the ongoing *“politicised pandemic”* (172–4);
- being *“categorically against [...] Bulgaria losing its Lev, its currency”* (148–51);
- Fighting *“the corporate, bought and [...] stimulated semi-forced vote”* (55–59);
- creating *“a working Bulgarian government that will start to solve the main problems of the Bulgarian nation.”* (163–5)

04. ANALYSIS / PART 1: QUALITATIVE METHODS

TEXT N° 2 – VALUES

Clearly, each of the goals could be deemed an expression **backward-looking restoration** [*“30 years ago we were proud to be second in intelligence [...] worldwide”* (177–8)] and **prevention of undergoing change** (e.g., being against the adoption of the Euro and the denationalisation of younger generations) in the name of the *“love for the homeland”* [literal translation of *rodolubie*, usually rendered as *patriotism* (lines 143, 151, 161, 190)].

However, against the background of the **euro-Atlantic, ‘liberal’ consensus** dominating Bulgarian politics, each of these affirmations sound more like a **stark break with the (recent) past**.

04. ANALYSIS | PART 1: QUALITATIVE METHODS

TEXT № 2 – MEANS-GOAL PREMISES

The M-G premise is uses the “strategic functions” of language in political discourse, and especially positive self-representation and negative representation of the other to push back against the interviewer’s alternative claim that “everyone plays in that field [viz. the right]”. Namely, Kostadinov takes issues against the main components of the Bulgarian political right accusing them of being insufficiently (if at all) revolutionary.



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04. ANALYSIS | PART 1: QUALITATIVE METHODS

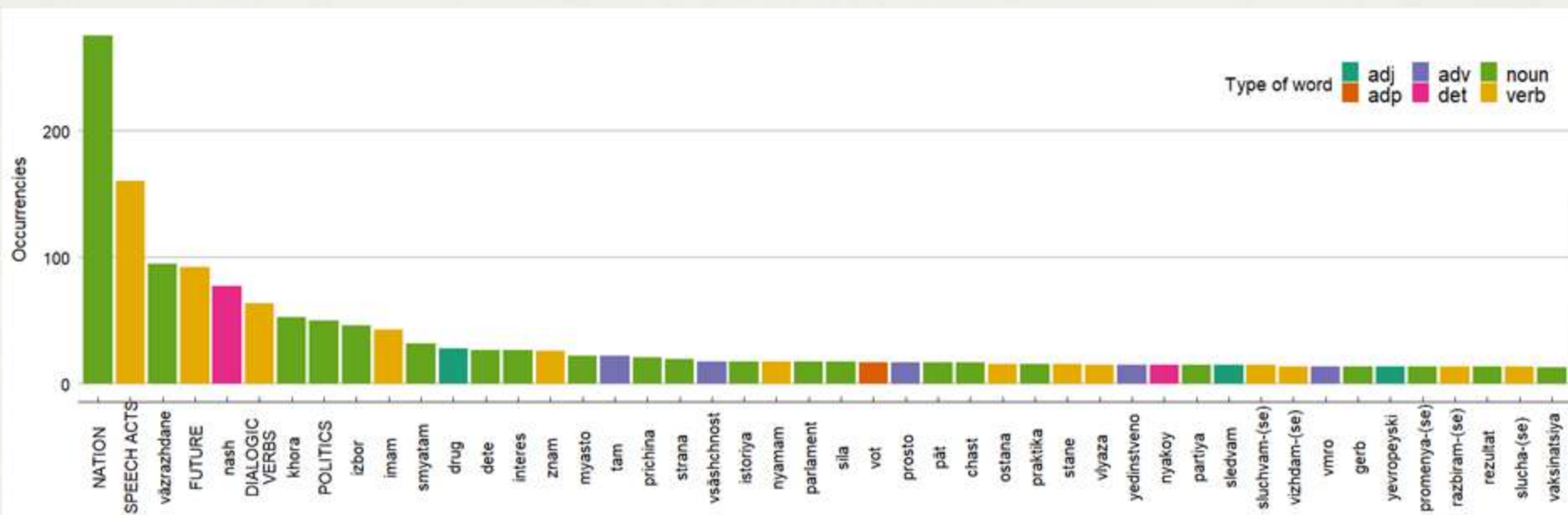
TEXT N° 2 – MEANS-GOAL PREMISES

So one ought to vote for *Văzrazhadane* to achieve these six goals because:

- It is the only party “working persistently” for change (lines 1–2);
- The centre-right is disconnected from Bulgarians’ reality because, mockingly, *“they like to call themselves ‘urban right’ — which is a bit funny to me actually [since] there should be a ‘village’ right too.”* (118–9);
- The nationalist right sold its soul to the corrupt elite in power having *“completely sold out and BETRAYED the interest of their voters.”* (131–2)
- The meteoritic *Ima takāv narod* (for the first academic work in English on ITN see Telarico 2022) is pointlessly appropriating folk songs: *“I love to sing folk songs too. And even with great pleasure I know probably much more than a hundred songs [...]. But that doesn’t mean anything actually”* (153–5).

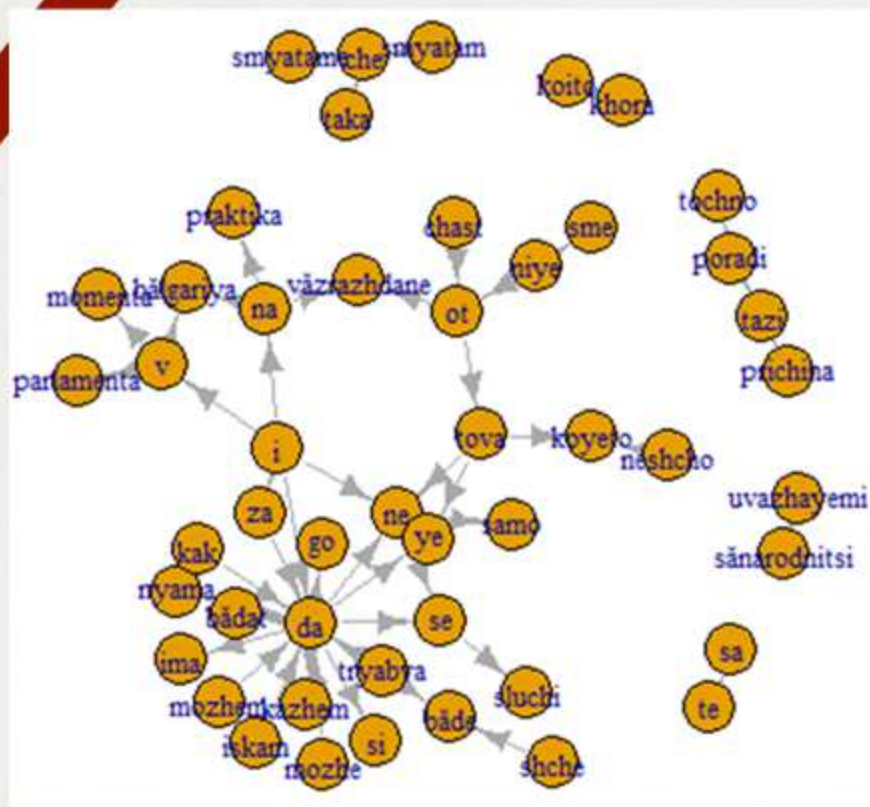
04. ANALYSIS | PART 2: QUANTITATIVE METHODS | LEXICAL PATTERNS

Running CAQDAS methods on the entire corpus allows to understand both the lexicon and the subtler “patterning of grammar” — which is “much more consequential, but much less analysed or reflected on.” (Butt, Lukin, and Matthiessen 2004, 270; cf. also Lukin, Butt, and Matthiessen 2004).

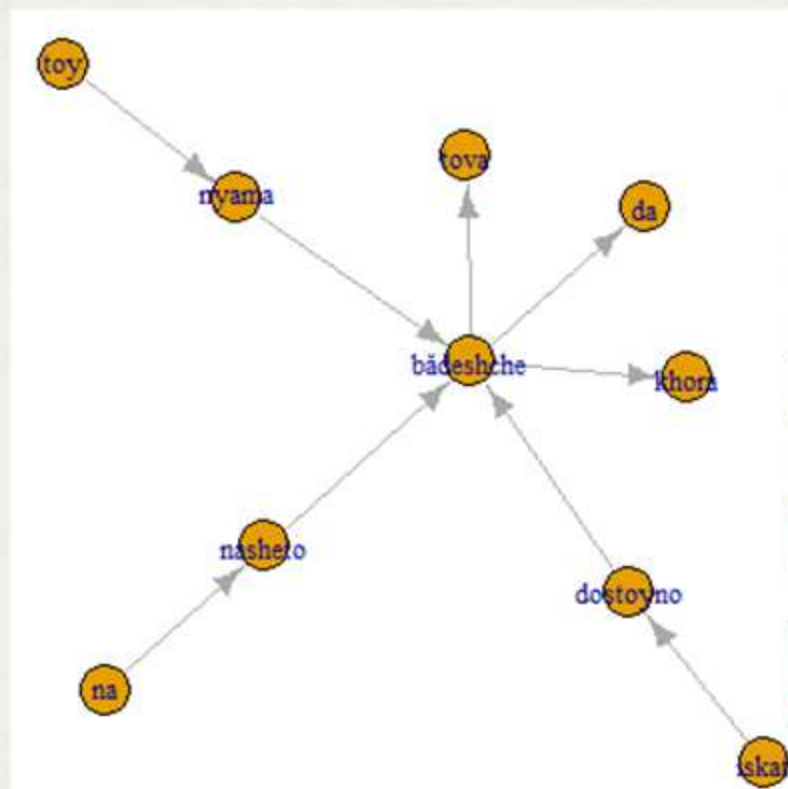


04. ANALYSIS / PART 2: QUANTITATIVE METHODS | GRAMMATICAL PATTERNS

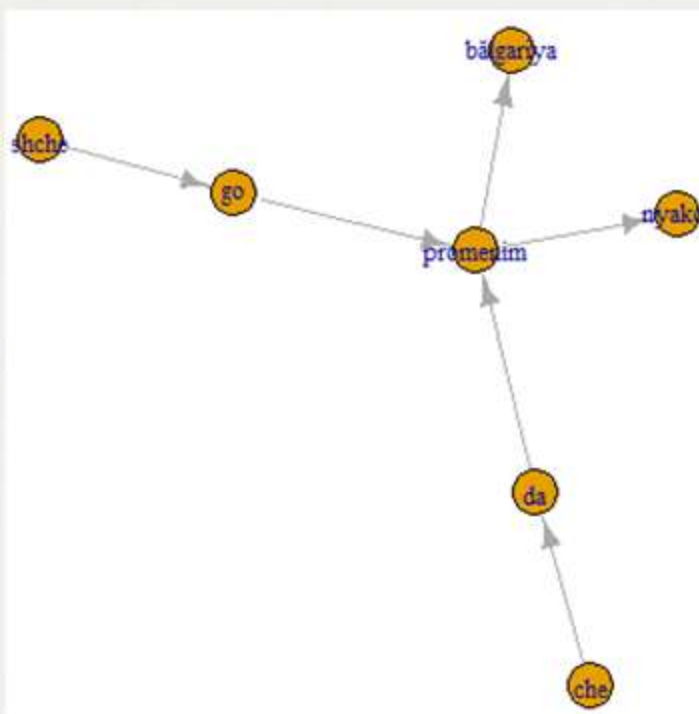
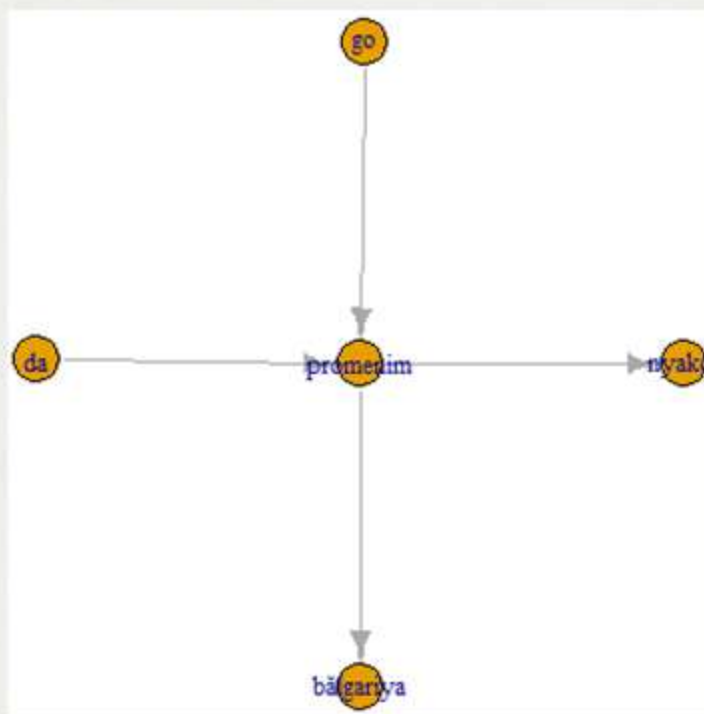
TRIGRAMS CONTAINING 'FUTURE'



ALL TRIGRAMS



04. ANALYSIS / PART 2: QUANTITATIVE METHODS | GRAMMATICAL PATTERNS



BI- AND TRIGRAMS CONTAINING 'CHANGE'

05. CONCLUSION

CASE-SPECIFIC



The topic of 'change' is central in the premise-conclusion structure of Kostadinov's deliberations and highlight the **positive image of 'future'**.



Lexical & Argumentative analysis: Văzrazhdane's discourse focuses mostly on actions to be realised in the extra-discursive world and it is rich in speech acts



Qualitative CDA: emphasis on the role of 'will' in the realisation of change and the improvement of personal qualities.



Time to open up the social sciences to theorisations and insights on the revolutionary nature of the political right provided in historical studies on fascism and Nazism.



Not to automatically expect a revolutionary right to be racist (or even Nazi). In fact, for all its emphasis on change and nationalistic rhetoric, Văzrazhdane's discourse pays no attention to ethnic and religious minorities

THEORY-BUILDING (?)

THANK YOU FOR
THE ATTENTION

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