

## GLITCH IN THE SYSTEM OR “GLITCH –BASED SYSTEM”?

A snapshot of recent Bulgarian-Turkish Foreign Policy  
Exchanges and Security Dynamics

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*“You can please some of the people all of the time, you can please all of the people some of the time,  
but you can’t please all of the people all of the time”.*”

— John Lydgate

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### A bit of a background

Despite the turbulent events and constant internal and foreign policy tensions in Turkey prior and following the failed coup d’état in July 2016 the Bulgarian foreign policy has strived to maintain a so-called “*pragmatic approach*” in dealing with its large and restless neighbor. The Bulgarian foreign policy and security apparatus while acknowledging the trends and dynamics of Turkish foreign and security policy that has undergone a dramatic stage of transformation from “zero problems with neighbors policy” (1) to almost “zero friends” in its immediate vicinity and beyond, has maintained a relatively stable line of steadily pragmatic strategic approach that excludes antagonism and harsh criticism of Erdogan’s regime and policies.

On contrary, despite the visible aggressive maneuvering of President Erdogan and the Turkish Prime Minister Yildirim after this years’ Constitutional referendum and prior and post-referendum foreign policy offensives on Turkish side, and the subsequent continuous escalation of tensions with the leaderships of key EU and NATO member countries all throughout 2017 up to date, the Bulgarian political leadership strives to continue to deliver strong *symbolic gestures* to its largest neighbor, in order to achieve its perceived strategic goals, namely 1) curbing and control of the migration pressure that has peaked in 2015 and its aftermath 2) stricter border control 3) close cooperation in dealing with terror, organized crime and human trafficking, as well as tackling the Islamic extremism challenges. These *symbolic and not-so symbolic Bulgarian gestures* include the top state visits in August 2016 (2) and in June 2017 (3), where the Bulgarian side has offered to become an intermediary

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.mfa.gov.tr/policy-of-zero-problems-with-our-neighbors.en.mfa>

<sup>2</sup><http://www.mediapool.bg/borisov-poe-rolyata-na-posrednik-mezhdu-ankara-i-bryuksel-news253379.html>

between Brussels and Ankara repetitively in the light of the incoming Bulgarian EU's Presidency in 2018 and symbolically the Bulgarian PM has paid a visit to his Turkish counterparts on the eve of his 58<sup>th</sup> birthday that he has celebrated during his official working trip with his Turkish hosts in June of 2017. Thus, at surface level the bilateral ties at least in these aforementioned dimensions (deliberately excluding from this analysis the energy security, Turkish political influence attempts in Bulgarian politics, resettlement compensations and other important bilateral issues), seem to be cloudless and cordial. Except the few “glitches” that always seem to “incidentally pop-up” during the official working and closing statements of the summits and of course the subsequent “*chamber echo effect*” created in Sofia, in accord with the main event and pursuit of Ankara's multi-layered agenda. In this regard, this year's Bulgarian-Turkish summit at the top in Ankara did not make exceptions from this pre-calculated strategy.

### Minor “Glitch in the System”?

Consider the awkward and not-so-delicate rub of the “pinch of salt” delivered by the Turkish prime minister Binali Yıldırım, who explicitly has “thanked his Bulgarian counterpart Boiko Borissov for his country's strong support during the 2016 attempted coup in Turkey” (4) and has restated his accusations of “Europe's silence” during 2016's events, while praising Bulgaria's sympathy for a starter, and the continuation assertion by Yıldırım that Bulgarian Prime Minister Borissov is a “guarantor that prevents extreme nationalistic events” (i.e. in a country that strives to maintain its' complicated multi-ethnic model despite the constant and persistent foreign influence attempts from various sources and destinations at social engineering that target Muslim minority and their nationalistic and populist radical right “mirror counterpart” parties). Note that the current Bulgarian PM actually leads a coalition government that is composed of centre-right populist GERB and the “odd” assortment of their coalition partners the so-called “United Patriots” – an alliance composed of the nationalistic and populist radical right (so-called “PPR”) parties “Ataka”, “The National Front for Salvation of Bulgaria” and the “Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization-Bulgarian National Movement – IMRO-BND”. In addition, during the most recent elections the substantial part of the main political opponents' campaign's attention was directed towards the perceived and much discussed very aggressive Turkish attempts to meddle into the Bulgarian election process and subsequent results that was to be addressed on official level from the Bulgarian President Radev and then interim PM Gerdjikov. In conjunction to these developments along this particularly antagonistic period of very tense Bulgarian-Turkish ties prior to the early 2017 Bulgarian general elections, the Bulgarian counterintelligence service (State Agency for National Security, i.e. “SANS”) in March 2017 has managed to act decisively against a number of Turkish citizens, where one for one of them “...Under Art. 4 of the State Agency for National Security Act and based on data, collected by the bodies of the Agency, an order on the part of the Chairperson of SANS has been issued for imposing the compulsory administrative measures “expulsion” and “ban for entry in the Republic of Bulgaria” for a period of five years against a Turkish citizen, who poses a threat to the national security of the Republic of Bulgaria” (5). At the same token “...a second Turkish

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<sup>3</sup> <http://boykoborissov.bg/bg/content/1845>

<sup>4</sup> <http://sofiaglobe.com/2017/06/13/turkish-pm-yildirim-thanks-borissov-for-bulgarias-support-during-attempted-coup/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.dans.bg/en/press-releases-menu-en?start=6>

citizen has been entered into the databases of the foreigners, who are unwanted in our country by an order of the Chairperson of SANS (on the grounds of Art. 21a of the Foreigners in the Republic of Bulgaria Act), since the person poses a threat to national security. According to the data, collected by the bodies of SANS, the two persons have conducted anti-constitutional activity, aimed against the sovereignty of the country and against the unity of the Bulgarian nation. Earlier, the Chairperson of SANS issued an order for the imposition of the compulsory administrative measures “withdrawal of the right of residence” and “ban for entry in the Republic of Bulgaria” for a period of five years against another Turkish citizen for creating anti-Bulgarian sentiments in regions of mixed population, aimed against the territorial integrity of the country. (6)” Thus, the Bulgarian state via its counterintelligence service has emitted a strong signal that the levels of unwanted Turkish activities connected to espionage, information gathering and stimulating anti-constitutional activities among religious minority has peaked and will be addressed in appropriate level, given the fact that one of the expelled Turkish citizens was Mr. Ibrahim Taranci (7) - official Turkish public servant of a higher rank, namely Secretary General of the Edirne District (i.e. Edirne Valiligi), or in other words the Governor of Edirne’s right hand man (8) have reached intolerable intensities.

But consider the “chamber echo effect” created by the Turkish Ambassador to Sofia Süleyman Gökçe whose lengthy and well-publicized public press-conference in Sofia on the 14<sup>th</sup> of July 2017, in concurrence with the top-level Bulgarian-Turkish state visit a day earlier, where he repeatedly states that “there is no Turkish support for any Bulgarian political party! Period!”(9) and continues to “persuade” the Bulgarian and the international public that “the enemies of the democracy will be fought with more democracy”, the coup d’état is actually in an essence a “junta –led putsch organized by a well-organized terrorist organization”(10). However, the “icing on the cake” came with His Excellency’s statement regarding the presence of “terrorist Gülenists’ structures and persons” in Bulgaria (11) and that “the Bulgarians should be very vigilant, as such events might happen even here”(12). From a perspective of a seasoned observer of Bulgarian-Turkish bilateral ties, one might qualify these “glitches”, as “Balkan politics as usual”, given the long and complicated history of these ties, a kind of a “rouger” episode of a seemingly never-ending soap-opera type sequel that is full of dramatic twists along the lines of the “Muhteşem Yüzyıl” (i.e. the now famous Turkish soap opera titled “The Magnificent Century” that has gained widespread popularity even outside the Balkan Peninsula).

However, even seasoned analysts sense that this episode, especially after the Turkish Constitutional referendum might point out that the “glitches” in the system might signal something less benign and tilt towards operational “*glitch - based system*” of bilateral ties where Bulgaria becomes vulnerable, very prone to “hand-twisting” and directly exposed towards internal Turkish conflicts’ export (13) and deeper engagement in Bulgarian internal

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.dans.bg/en/press-releases-menu-en?start=6>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/bulgaristan-edirne-valiligi-ozel-kalem-mudurunu-sinir-disi-etti-40400627>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.dnes.bg/politika/2017/03/20/glavniat-sekretar-na-valiistvoto-v-odrin-sred-izgonenite-ot-dans.335402>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.bgnes.com/bylgaria/politika/4523050/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://offnews.bg/obshtestvo/giokche-teroristite-giulenisti-imat-strukturi-v-balgaria-660518.html>

<sup>11</sup> <http://bnr.bg/post/100852759/gvokche-organizaciata-na-fetulah-gulen-ima-strukturi-i-v-balgaria>

<sup>12</sup> [https://www.actualno.com/politics/giokche-turskoto-pravitelstvo-ne-podpomaga-bylgarski-partii-tochka-povyprosa-news\\_622379.html](https://www.actualno.com/politics/giokche-turskoto-pravitelstvo-ne-podpomaga-bylgarski-partii-tochka-povyprosa-news_622379.html)

<sup>13</sup> <http://riskmanagementlab.com/product/%D1%80%D0%B8%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B5%D1%82%D0%B5-%D0%BE%D1%82-%D1%82%D1%83%D1%80%D1%86%D0%B8%D1%8F->

affairs (14) via heavy-handed attempts towards manipulation of Bulgarian Turkish and Muslim population through various channels, not only political but religious such, as the Turkish Religious Affairs Directorate (the so-called “Diyamet İşleri Başkanlığı”) for instance (15).

### Minor “Glitches” that Create Major Confusions

When considering the timing, type and magnitude of occurrence of such “*minor glitches*” on bilateral level that in the envisioned recent past period are usually stimulated mainly by the Turkish strategic leadership, one might ask what are the strategic objectives and what peculiarities the “glitches” have. The discussion of the Turkish strategic objectives under Erdogan’s leadership has produced a huge volume of scholarly attention and analysis and has “distilled” and pointed out quite clear conclusions that will not be discussed at this point in-depth in this analysis.

Rather, more relevant for our focus would be to look at the illustrious examples of the aforementioned “glitches” and to see if they fall within a certain type of pattern that is the hypothesis of this short brief, or are as claimed to be “incidental” occurrences (i.e. “singularity events”). In order to support the former claim, namely that the “glitches” actually *follow quite orderly pattern* that fits quite well Erdogan’s strategic doctrine’s aims concerning Turkey’s influence and power projection in its immediate vicinity on the Balkans, in conjunction with his bargaining strategy vis-à-vis the European Union, we would like to provide some very recent illustrative examples that would represent such “incidental glitches” aimed towards external and *purely internal* consumption for the Turkish public life. Considering the most recent case against the background of the described top-level political dynamics of Bulgarian-Turkish bilateral ties described in the opening section of this article, one might gain an important insight of the specifics of the “glitches” and seriously consider the option proposed as an hypothesis here, that the “glitches” are neither accidental, nor random and are based on the idea of strategic pursuit on the Turkish side to continue to push for what I refer to as “glitch-based” system of bilateral relations, where the Bulgarian side has to constantly make symbolic and not-so-symbolic concessions. These in turn are used by the top Turkish leadership, as a kind of “*diplomatic success advertisement*” by the regime to bolster legitimacy and leverage at home and abroad alike.

The freshest illustrious example of the type of “accidental glitches” presents itself in a form of the official report of the Republic of Turkey’s Ministry of Interior (i.e. “İçişleri Bakanlığı”) titled “Turkey’s Fight Against DEASH” / TÜRKİYE’NİN DEAŞ İLE MÜCADELESİ<sup>16</sup> published in July of 2017 and dedicated to the Turkish efforts in combating ISIS-related terrorism. Beyond the overall informative picture that sheds light on the official Turkish position regarding the partner countries’ shortfalls in effective terrorism combating, for our

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[http://riskmanagementlab.com/product/%D0%B7%D0%B0-](http://riskmanagementlab.com/product/%D0%B7%D0%B0-%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%BE%D1%82%D0%B8%D0%B2%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%B5%D0%B9%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B2%D0%B8%D0%B5%D1%82%D0%BE-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%B8%D1%81%D0%BB%D1%8F%D0%BC%D0%B8%D0%B7%D0%BC%D0%B0-%D0%B8-%D0%BE/)

[http://riskmanagementlab.com/product/%D0%B7%D0%B0-](http://riskmanagementlab.com/product/%D0%B7%D0%B0-%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%BE%D1%82%D0%B8%D0%B2%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%B5%D0%B9%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B2%D0%B8%D0%B5%D1%82%D0%BE-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%B8%D1%81%D0%BB%D1%8F%D0%BC%D0%B8%D0%B7%D0%BC%D0%B0-%D0%B8-%D0%BE/)

[http://www.capital.bg/politika\\_i\\_ikonomika/bulgaria/2017/06/08/2985260\\_kak\\_bulgarskite\\_imami\\_ostanaha\\_bez\\_pari/](http://www.capital.bg/politika_i_ikonomika/bulgaria/2017/06/08/2985260_kak_bulgarskite_imami_ostanaha_bez_pari/)

<http://www.mia.gov.tr/kurumlar/mia.gov.tr/Genel/deas%CC%A7%207%20temmuz.pdf>

<http://www.mia.gov.tr/kurumlar/mia.gov.tr/Genel/deas%CC%A7%207%20temmuz.pdf>

specific focus on Bulgarian-Turkish ties, the report paints quite unfavorable picture of Bulgaria in the context of security and terror prevention.

Namely, the report places Bulgaria within the “top ten” of European countries where people related to ISIS reside (17), as visible from the statistics related to deportation and no-entry lists derived, as claimed in the Report from the General Directorate of Migration Management (see. pg. 57 of the Report).

**Table 1.** Adapted from “*Turkey’s Fight Against DEASH*” Report, Republic of Turkey’s Ministry of Interior, pg. 57.

SINIR DIŐI EDİLEN / DEPORTATION INFORMATION			
AB ÜYESİ İLK 10 ÜLKE / TOP 10 EU COUNTRIES		İLK 10 ÜLKE / TOP 10 COUNTRIES	
UYRUĐU / NATIONALITY	TOPLAM TOTAL	UYRUĐU / NATIONALITY	TOPLAM TOTAL
FRANSA / FRANCE	252	RUSYA / RUSSIA	804
ALMANYA / GERMANY	133	ENDONEZYA / INDONESIA	435
BİRLEŐİK KRALLIK / UNITED KINGDOM	106	TACİKİSTAN / TAJIKISTAN	308
İSVEÇ / SWEDEN	55	IRAK / IRAQ	278
BELÇİKA / BELGIUM	37	FRANSA / FRANCE	254
AVUSTURYA / AUSTRIA	31	AZERBAYCAN / AZERBAIJAN	252
DANİMARKA / DENMARK	23	FAS / FAS	183
HOLLANDA / HOLLAND	22	MISIR / EGYPT	150
BULGARİSTAN / BULGARIA	21	SUUDİ ARABİSTAN / SAUDI ARABIA	141
İSPANYA / SPAIN	21	ALMANYA / GERMANY	133
DIĐER / OTHER	71	DIĐER / OTHER	2.019
TOPLAM /TOTAL	772	TOPLAM /TOTAL	4.957

In addition, the Report claims that seventy-seven Bulgarian nationals represent a threat to the national security of Turkey, as they are put on the “no-entry list due to being affiliated with terrorism”, and “may cross the conflict zones” (ibid. pg. 58).

<sup>17</sup> <https://nova.bg/news/view/2017/07/17/187970/77-%D0%B1%D1%8A%D0%BB%D0%B3%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%B8-%D0%B7%D0%B0%D0%BF%D0%BB%D0%B0%D1%85%D0%B0-%D0%B7%D0%B0-%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%86%D0%B8%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%B0%D0%BB%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B0-%D1%81%D0%B8%D0%B3%D1%83%D1%80%D0%BD%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%82-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D1%82%D1%83%D1%80%D1%86%D0%B8%D1%8F/>

**Table 2.** Adapted from “*Turkey’s Fight Against DEASH*” Report, Republic of Turkey’s Ministry of Interior, pg. 58.

GİRİŞ YASAĞI KONULAN / BAN INFORMATION			
AB ÜYESİ İLK 10 ÜLKE / TOP 10 EU COUNTRIES		İLK 10 ÜLKE / TOP 10 COUNTRIES	
ÜLKELER / NATIONALITY	TOPLAM TOTAL	ÜLKELER / NATIONALITY	TOPLAM TOTAL
FRANSA / FRANCE	2.622	SUUDİ ARABİSTAN / SAUDI ARABIA	7.523
BELÇİKA / BELGIUM	1.519	TUNUS / TUNUS	4.605
BİRLEŞİK KRALLIK / UNITED KINGDOM	1.172	RUSYA FEDERASYONU / RUSSIAN FEDERATION	4.128
ALMANYA / GERMANY	657	FAS / FAS	2.851
HOLLANDA / HOLLAND	520	TACİKİSTAN / TAJIKISTAN	2.651
İSPANYA / SPAIN	525	FRANSA / FRANCE	2.622
İSVEÇ / SWEDEN	300	İRAK / IRAQ	2.085
DANİMARKA / DANMARK	196	KAZAKİSTAN / KAZAKISTAN	1.914
AVUSTURYA / AUSTRIA	153	AZERBAYCAN / AZERBAIJAN	1.677
BULGARİSTAN / BULGARIA	77	BELÇİKA / BELGIUM	1.519
DİĞER / OTHER	387	DİĞER / OTHER	22.226
<b>TOPLAM / TOTAL</b>	<b>7.928</b>	<b>TOPLAM / TOTAL</b>	<b>53.781</b>

Considering the timing and the content specifics of the public announcement of the Turkish Interior Ministry’s report (i.e.in July, right after PM Borissov’s visit to Turkey) against the background of the timing, topic selection and discussion specifics of the bilateral diplomatic activity at the top during the state visit, namely security, migration, terrorism and state of bilateral affairs between Bulgaria and Turkey, given the composition of the Bulgarian delegation that included Vice-PM and Foreign Minister Zaharieva, as well as the ex-Minister of culture Rashidov (another very symbolic gesture, given the ethnic origin and professional background of the ex-public official), provide plenty “food for thought” about the nature of this particular “minor glitch”. In the regular discourse of recent Balkan politics, such “wheeling and dealing” would be probably largely ignored and probably soon forgotten, had it not have a “*long tail effect*” in Sofia after the much-advertised trip of Bulgarian PM to Turkey. The “long tail effect” has consisted of the *complete surprise and visible confusion* of the Bulgarian officials that were immediately pursued by the local media to respond and react to the data released in the Turkish report pertaining Bulgarian nationals included in the document. The Bulgarian Vice-PM and Foreign Minister Zaharieva, in an interview from Brussels for a major Bulgarian media on the 17<sup>th</sup> of June is visibly caught by surprise in front of the TV camera and claims no knowledge or further details about the Turkish travel ban concerning Bulgarian citizens and redirects further media inquiry towards Bulgarian security officials that might possess such further details (18). Further on, the next day the head of SANS Dimitar Georgiev announces that the Agency does not have official information regarding the seventy-seven persons on the “black list”(19), similar reactions are expressed by

<sup>18</sup><https://www.vesti.bg/bulgaria/bylgarite-v-top-10-na-opasnite-za-turcia-6071580>

<sup>19</sup><https://www.24chasa.bg/novini/article/6343195>

the Bulgarian Minister of Interior Valentin Radev who adds a comment about the “unrealistically high number of people in the list, as well as its reliability”(20), as well as from the Prosecutor General Tzatarov (21) and media friendly outlets towards the officials of the Bulgarian State Intelligence Agency (SIA). However, the “damage is done” whether intentionally or not – the Bulgarian top foreign policy, security and intelligence officials seem publicly caught “off guard” and confused, thus pushed in a defensive mode of publicly explaining and interpreting the released limited Turkish data.

### Constant Concessions or the features of a “Glitch-based” System?

When considering this particular latest episode that features the “incidental glitch”, we should bear in mind the internal dynamics of Turkish political life with all of its complexity and intricacies after the constitutional referendum held in April 2017 and the strive of Erdogan to consolidate even further his grip on power, as tightly, as possible at any cost.

These dynamics include the issues that would *consolidate and pacify* the divided Turkish electorate by “mending the cracks” in general consensus and *divert attention towards issues with potential to consolidate and engage the electorate*. Such conclusions could be supported by the recently released traditional poll conducted by Kadir Has University, where the majority of the Turkish electorate considers the fight against terror to be issue of primary and utmost concern (22.) In addition, the numbers reveal very curious details about the internal attitudes after the referendum, namely 1) substantial hike in public perception about the role of the President, as a key player in the foreign policy domain, 2) sharp hike in perception that the U.S. is a threat to Turkey (66.5% see the U.S. as a threat, compared to last year’s 44%), and 3) a substantial hike of negative perception of EU member countries (24% rise, compared to previous years’ oscillations around 10%). When looking at the major takeaways from the traditional poll, namely the hikes of threat perception of the U.S. and the hike of the negative perception of the EU member countries, in combination with the major concern of the Turkish public – fight against terror, as a primer foreign policy issue, then it would be logical to relate the strategy of locating and pinpointing the enemy externally, especially in countries bordering Turkey via possible inflation of numbers and threat exaggeration.

Thus, going back to the case in point – the recent dynamics of Bulgarian-Turkish bilateral relations, such strategy seems to be logical from Ankara’s side and bears the features of continuation of a multifunctional strategy towards Sofia, referred earlier here as “*glitch-based system*” of recent bilateral relations that employ *constant pressure on Turkish side and constant concessions on Bulgarian one*. Main drivers in this type of bilateral dynamic are the strategic goals of the Bulgarian foreign and security policies directly connected to curbing of repeat migrant pressure waves heading West and towards the inward “core” of the EU, calming the wide public fear of terror and migration, tighter border control management, while still maintaining cordial relations within “Bulgaria’s major partner on the Southern NATO flank”(23), as well as the fears of “spillover” effects stemming from possible Turkish internal instability. Definitely not an easy “balancing act” that implies complicated internal logic aimed to simultaneously please politically and culturally heterogeneous internal publics and EU and NATO partners from Brussels and Berlin to Ankara, at the same time. Such logic

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<sup>20</sup> <https://news.bg/crime/turtsiya-slozhi-v-cheren-spisak-77-balgari-za-terorizam.html>

<sup>21</sup> <https://m.fakti.bg/bulgaria/249354-slubite-namame-danni-za-turskia-spisak-sas-77-balgari#>

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/Default.aspx?pageID=238&nID=115760&NewsCatID=338>

<sup>23</sup> <http://news.bnt.bg/a/borisov-v-ankara-turtsiya-e-nashiyat-partnor-na-yuzhniya-flang-na-nato>

has led to string of concessions on Sofia's side that were "swept under the carpet" at home by presenting them as "minor glitches" that are rather episodic.

However, turning a "blind eye" on a provocation in a form of limited data in an official report, possibly designed for Turkish internal consumption released in 2017 (i.e. „*rally around the flag*” type of political regime consolidation of Erdogan) and simultaneously via testing the reactions and responses of Bulgarian political leadership is one thing. But concessions in a form of "silent extraditions" (24) on the "edge of the law" (25) that possibly contravene the Bulgarian Constitution of alleged supporters of Fetullah Gülen and opponents of Erdogan's regime without firm Turkish guarantees for fair trial process, such as the case of Abdullah Büyük, the Turkish businessman who had sought political asylum in Bulgaria last year, but despite two extradition denial decisions from two instances of Bulgarian courts has been extradited and handed to the Turkish authorities, is *entirely different level of compromise*.

One that costs quite dearly to Bulgaria's rule of law institutional trust, own power abilities and global image projection, as a respected member of the European Union and NATO.

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<sup>24</sup><https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/bulgaria-extradites-alleged-gulenists-to-turkey/>

<sup>25</sup><https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/bulgarians-outraged-by-deportation-of-gulen-supporter-to-turkey/>