

AFTER THE LOCAL ELECTIONS IN BULGARIA IN 2019 - A PROFILE OF THE MUNICIPAL MAYOR

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Abstract

The article presents the results of a survey on the profile of the municipal mayor in Bulgaria after the local elections in autumn of 2019. The article is a continuation of a previous empirical study on competencies and social profile of the municipal mayor in the mandate 2015 - 2019. The main goal of the study is to identify the average profile of Bulgarian municipal mayors in terms of their age, gender, education, professional and political experience, party affiliation, and others. In the spirit of the new institutionalism, the study has been broadened in order to include a tracing of institutional traditions, legislative competencies, comparative analysis with the other EU Member States, conclusions from the real practice.
Keywords: municipal mayors; party elites; local decentralization

Introduction

The figure of the municipal mayor as a legitimate and recognized body of the local power is an important object of study, taking into account that the strong local self-government is a guarantor for democracy and it creates the more effective way in resolving local communities problems. The current article aims at filling the gap of studies on the profile of the Bulgarian municipal mayors, especially related to their specific social base. The article is a continuation of a survey on the biographical data of all current municipal mayors, conducted in the period October - November 2018². Their mandate ended with the elections conducted in the period 27 October - 3 November 2019. The idea is to compare the data and to trace the tendency and the changes.

The leading question that motivated the research is *what are the characteristics of the people leading the executive power in Bulgarian municipalities, what candidates do the Bulgarian voters vote for*. Traditional research within institutionalism would be limited only to analysis of the mayor's legislative competencies and its formal place in government structure. In the spirit of *the new institutionalism, the research is broadened in order to include tracing of institutional traditions, comparative analysis, conclusions from the real practice, and last but not least, the actual social profile* of the current municipal mayors in Bulgaria.

The specific motive for the topic of the article is the research interest caused by a study of European municipality mayors in view of the role of local leaders and their social profile.³ However, Bulgaria is one of only five EU Member States not included in the study, and the answer to the question of who specifically governs Bulgarian municipalities arouses research curiosity. A limited part of the

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² Petrov, S. Status and social profile of the Bulgarian municipal mayor, Democracy, decentralization, self-government. Anniversary collection in honour of the 60th anniversary of Assos. Prof. Milena Stefanova, Sofia, 2019

³ Political Leaders and Changing Local Democracy. The European Mayor. is an issue of the International Institute for administrative sciences and edited by Hubert Heinelt (et all.). Mayors of cities with a population of over 10 000 in 29 European countries are being surveyed. The survey was conducted from the end of 2014 to the end of 2016.

profile of mayors in Bulgaria was studied only in 2006 by Milena Stefanova and staff (Stefanova, 2006).

The empirical part is based on own cabinet survey of the biographical data of all current municipal mayors, elected in the autumn of 2019, conducted in the period February - March 2020⁴.

Social profile of the Bulgarian municipal mayor after the elections of 2019

In order to answer the key question of who governs Bulgarian municipalities, in addition to the review of formal powers and institutional tradition, it is necessary to examine the actual, including the social profile of people who actually hold mayoral positions. This should also include a consideration of the average number of mayoral mandates, the age, gender, the educational and professional structure of the municipal mayors, their party affiliation, their participation or non-participation in political positions at other levels of government.

The main conclusions of the study, which will be confirmed in more detail in the next section, are:

- The vote in municipalities is becoming even more stable and predictable - 75% of the mayors have been re-elected, and the half of the others are not running at all, 60% of the executive bodies have been elected in the first round;
- There is no clear professional experience summarizing the municipal mayors, but the so-called speaking and brokerage professions are significantly less represented than in a comparative European plan;
- The share of women remains stable - about 13% and most of the mayors are in the age groups 40-49 and 50-59 years old
- The average years of position and mayors with three and more mandates are increasing
- The transition of political elites between the local, regional and national levels is symbolic, the local political elites and the potential mayoral candidates are relatively closed;
- There is little information and public discussion about the education, professional, and social status of mayors and candidates.

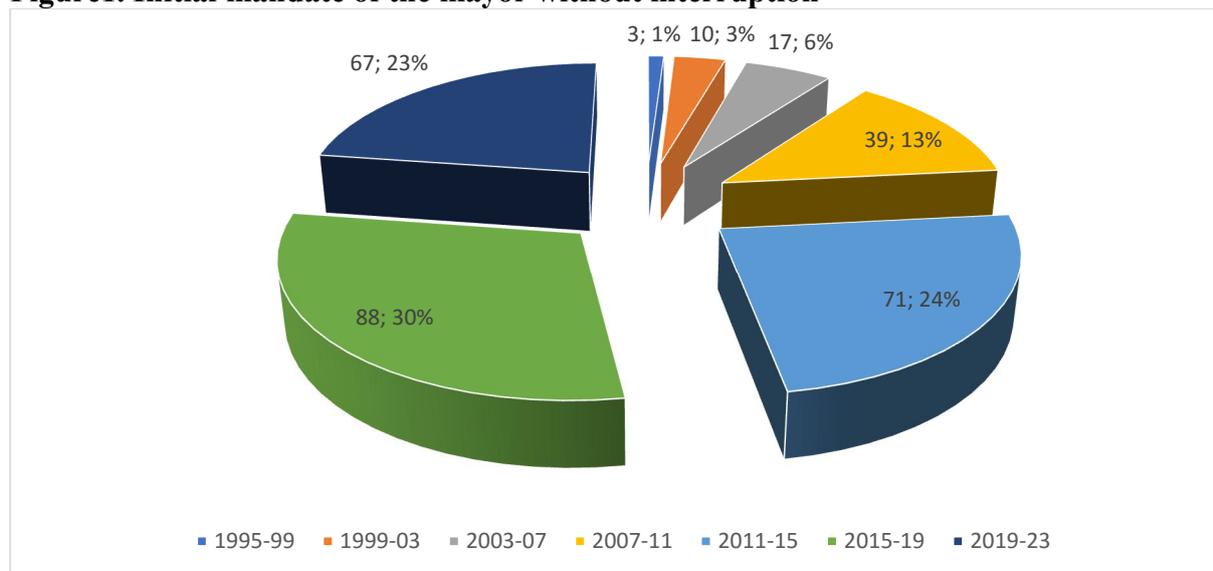
Duration of the mandate, structure by age and gender

In 2019, the eighth local elections after the democratic changes were held in Bulgaria. Citizens of 265 municipalities elected municipal mayors. The first important step in the characterization of the current municipal mayors is the number of uninterrupted mandates during which they govern the municipality. The elected for the first time mayors in the last elections, who are currently in office, are 63, to which we should add 4 elected mayors who were mayors in previous periods and in 2019 were re-elected. This results in 67 people who govern without interruption only for the current mandate. For comparison, within the previous mandate, this was 106 people (more than a third of all mayors). That's a decrease of a third of the new mayors.

Currently, the mayors elected for the first time in the previous mandate are 77 (seven in a partial vote), the mayors elected in the 2011-2015 mandate are 71 (three in a partial vote), 39 were elected within the 2007-2011 mandate, 17 - in 2003, 10 - in 1999. Two are the municipal mayors, who were elected still in 1995 (in the municipalities of Gotse Delchev and Bolyarovo), two have governed since the first democratic elections in 1991, which means that they have been elected for the eighth time in a row (in the municipalities of Medkovets and Popovo). Thus, two factors influence the results - on the one hand, the aging of the first generation of post-democratic mayors and on the other, the emergence of the party GERB with new faces where the party did not recognize the acting mayors.

⁴ Main sources of data are the websites of all 265 municipalities in Bulgaria, the information portal KMETA.bg (<http://www.kmeta.bg/>) and the register of administrative structures (<http://iisda.government.bg/>). The information is supplemented by biographical data, accompanying interviews, parties election bulletins, personal web pages, social networks profiles, etc.

Figure1. Initial mandate of the mayor without interruption



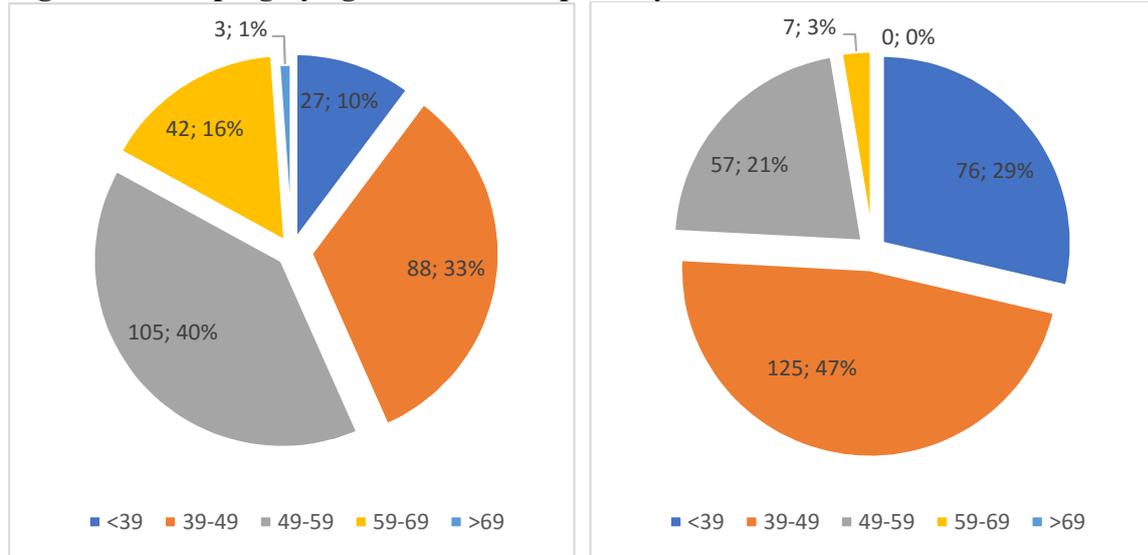
Source: Personal research and calculations

Of those who currently run municipalities, 16 mayors (about 6%, compared to 8% in the previous mandate) have an interruption in their mandate and subsequently are being re-elected. This shows, albeit to a lesser extent, a level of resilience of local political elites. Moreover, in some cases, the break is not one mandate, but for three or four (the municipalities of Krushari, Belogradchik). There are isolated cases in which the interruption of mandates is due to holding a political position in other levels of government.

Taking into account the length of the mandate of mayors with an interruption in the position, the current elected officials would be in the office at the end of the mandate for an average of 10.9 years, or more than two and a half mandates. This is one of the few studied indicators in which there is a clear difference between the municipalities, which are also regional centers, and the others. Only for 27 municipalities with a regional center, the average duration of the mandate is lower. In the last elections, 8 of the mayors were elected for the first time, and the only mayors governing for longer were the mayors of Montana, Zlatko Zhivkov (elected for the 6th mandate) and the mayor of Kardzhali, Hassan Azis (for 5th mandate). Women mayors also govern shorter than the general case - by an average of 1 year, as Sebihan Mehmed has the longest tenure (mayor of Krumovgrad since 2003). The mayors in 67 municipalities are new. In 33 the acting mayors do not run at all, and in 34 they lose (8 in the first round). One-third of the new candidacies are due to the specific policy of the party MFR (DPS) for staff renewal, and another factor that influenced some changes, are some internal party contradictions on a local and national level in the ruling GERB party. Half of the losing mayors (16) have governed only one mandate and have failed to consolidate their positions. There are only a few cases of candidates losing after three or more seats (eg. Bregovo).

The average age of the current municipal mayors, at the time of their election, is 51 years old, and when they were elected for the first time, regardless of the interruptions - 44.1 years old. There is no serious gender specificity (only for women the data are 50.7 and 44.5, respectively).

Figure 2. Grouping by age of the municipal mayors



Age at the beginning of the mandate 2019-23 years

Age when elected for the first time, including for those with interruption of the mandate

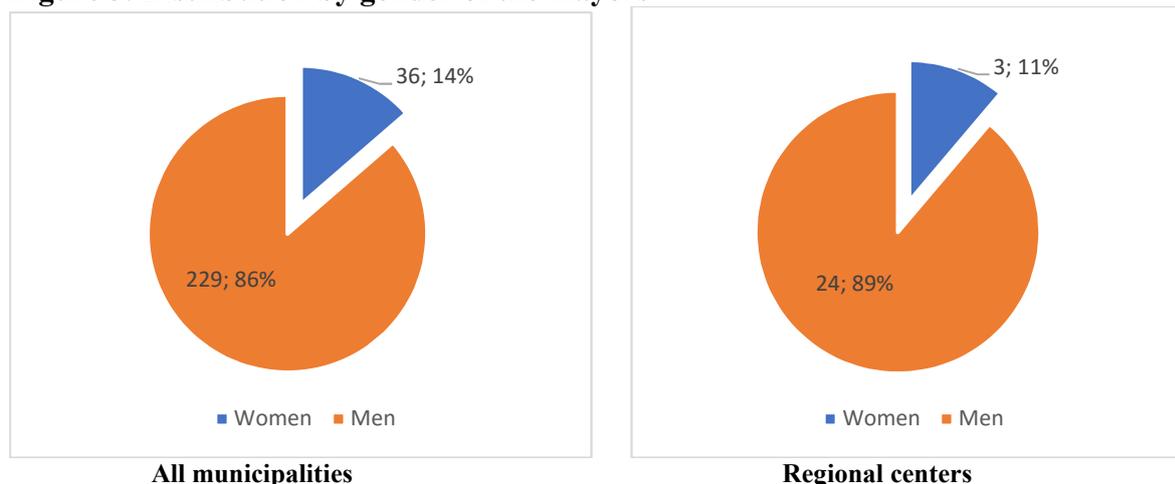
Source: Personal research and calculations

The age structure of mayors shows that 40% are in the group of 50 - 59 years old by the autumn of 2019 (this coincides with the result of the European comparative study in the "European Mayor", Heinelt, Magnier, Cabria, Reynaert, 2018), and in the time of the election almost the half is in the group of 40 - 49 years old. Some authors call the "mantra" of elite research (Steyvers, 2018) the representatives, who are usually middle-aged and middle-class men. There is an over-representation of this population at every level of government. The distribution of political elites by age is a key aspect of their social status. The openness of the political arena and the ability of the system to benefit groups of all ages is an important factor.

Three of the current municipal mayors are over 70 years old (in the municipalities of Zemen, Rakitovo, and Novo Selo). The age is higher in the smaller municipalities. The youngest mayors - 9 are between 30 and 35 years old. Four of them will govern for a second mandate. Among the newly elected mayors, there is one at 69 years old and three at 65 years old. In general, the middle-aged candidates win nominations and elections because of: already acquired professional and/or political experience, which makes them more competitive for representative positions; more time to devote to politics after going through personal time-consuming periods (eg. children, vocational training); and already established social, professional, and party networks that facilitate access (Navarro, 2018).

Bulgaria is among the countries with a relatively modest share of women in elected political positions at both national and local levels. By 2019, only 36 out of 265 municipalities have elected a woman mayor. This gives a 13.6% share. This is almost the same share as in the previous mandate - 35, or 13.2%. In the municipalities with a regional center the result is close - 3 out of 27 municipalities have a female mayor (Gabrovo, Lovech, Sofia, they decrease by one after the lost elections by the current mayor of Pernik). However, it is worth noting that one of these municipalities is the capital Sofia, where after the first partial vote Yordanka Fandakova governs for a fourth mandate. The *trend of mayors - women* is also positive - 9% in 2003, 10% in 2007, and 11% in 2011. The comparative study of local European leaders shows a mixed picture in different countries - from 4.1% for Greece and 4.2% for Slovenia to 34.1% for Sweden, with an average of 13.7%. For Bulgaria in the municipalities with over 10 000 inhabitants, almost 14% of the mayors are women.

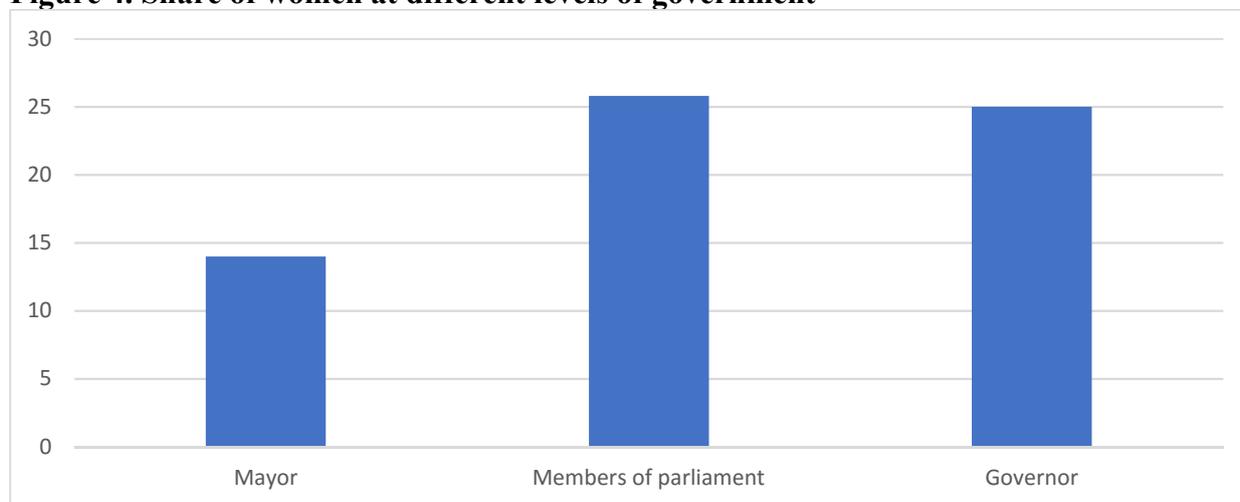
Figure 3. Distribution by gender of the mayors



Source: Personal research and calculations

It is interesting to compare the share of women municipal mayors and their presence at other levels of government. In the current Municipal Councils, one-quarter of the councilors are women. As of the spring of 2020, there are 7 women or 25% among the 28 regional governors (this proportion has been relatively stable in recent years). Women are 62 out of a total of 240 deputies in the National Parliament or 25.8%. In the first democratic parliaments, the share was lower - in 1990 it was 10%, in 1991 - 1994 - 14%. A major change occurred in 2001 - 27%, and since then the share has been steadily between 20 and 26%.

Figure 4. Share of women at different levels of government



Source: Personal research and calculations

The insufficient representation of women in the political class is one of the most frequently reported and studied aspects of political life. In general, three categories of factors are identified to explain the differences in the levels of women's participation in political life: institutional - electoral rules, party selection, including quotas; socio-economic - such as the share of women in the total economically active workforce; and cultural - such as the perception of gender equality (Kittilson, 2013).

Of independent interest is the question of whether the size of the municipality affects the key elements in the social profile of mayors. As mentioned, the municipal level in Bulgaria is relatively large in a comparative way. There are no differences in terms of the age at which candidates are selected. Women have the largest relative share in medium-sized municipalities. The biggest

differences are in the level of education - from only 2% of mayors who do not have a university degree in large municipalities to almost 15% in small ones.

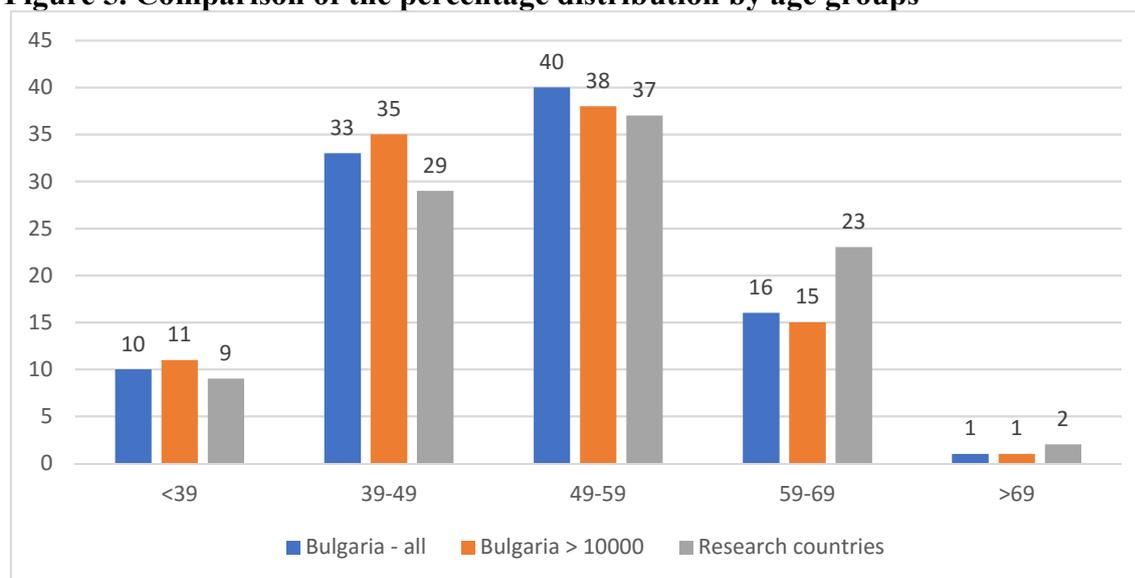
Table 1. Basic data according to the municipality size

Size of the municipality, Data from NSI of 2017	Number of municipalities	Years on the position at the end of the mandate	Age upon admission	Age at the end of the mandate	Women	Secondary education
Up to 10000	129	10	44,4	55,4	17	25
10001-30000	92	10,9	43,5	54,4	15	8
Over 30001	44	10,5	44,1	54,6	4	1

Source: NSI, personal research and calculations

In the survey of local leaders at communities with more than 10,000 people at the European level, the mayors are divided into five age groups. If we compare the data with the Bulgarian case, there are no serious differences with the mayors of this type of municipalities in Bulgaria, with the predominance of middle-aged mayors, but when all municipalities are taken into account, the age increases.

Figure 5. Comparison of the percentage distribution by age groups



Source: Heinelt, Magnier, Cabria, Reynaert (2018) and personal research and calculations

Education and professional experience of the municipal mayors

The strong mayor, such as the Bulgarian one with certain conditions, gets his mandate through the vote of the voters. The form of the "strong mayor" is very dependent on his personal qualities. He/she plays three main roles - ceremonial (spokesman of the municipality, representative of the population and the party to which he belongs); a local leader (to provide general guidance, make forecasts, determine the needs of the municipality and suggest ways to meet them), and a direct administrative manager (Stefanova, 2003). His ability to cope with the requirements of these roles is related to his educational and professional status.

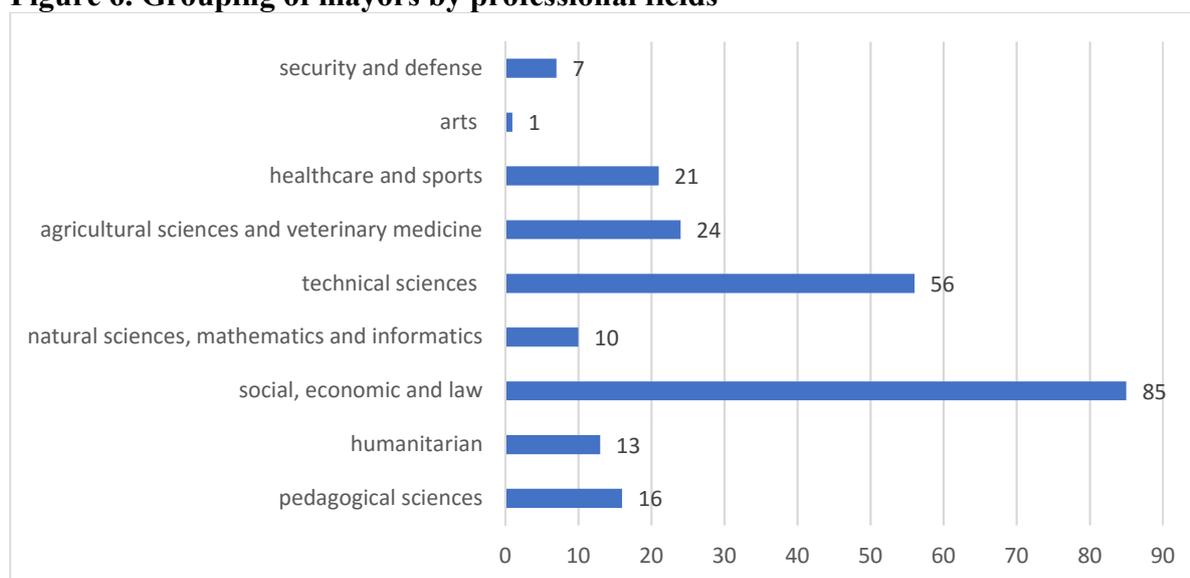
231 municipal mayors or 87.2% have higher education when they are elected as mayor. This is a high share in comparative terms. Three local representatives have a doctorate. 34 people, only men, become mayors with secondary education. No woman without a university degree has been elected mayor, which confirms the difficult entry into politics for this gender. Five of these 34 local candidates are graduating from University while they are mayors (this raises questions about the knowledge and skills acquired), and a few more are either currently studying or have only completed a semester. The share of those without a university degree is much higher among mayors of town halls, but this is determined by a number of objective and subjective factors.

Here is the right place where the attention should be paid to the question of whether the normative imposition of educational qualification for municipal mayors is necessary. Such a rule was even included in the Law on Local Government and Local Administration in 2006, but after a number of disputes, including a referral to the Constitutional Court by the ombudsman Ginyo Ganev, it was withdrawn. In Bulgaria, there is indeed some experience with such a requirement in the first years after the Liberation, but such regulation is hardly useful for the maturity of the society. The local political community itself must realize that there must be high expectations of the mayor in advance. Moreover, the share of mayors with a university degree is growing and in line with the European trends. An average of 81.5% of those surveyed has a university degree. In Albania, Lithuania, and Iceland, their share is 100%, and this is linked to educational qualifications. The share is low in Austria, Sweden, Italy, Norway, Switzerland - below 70%, and in some cases below 60%.

In case of a high share of mayors with higher education, the question of the professional areas to which the mayors belong becomes more important. The empirical research showed quite interesting results, which, however, raise some serious questions about the level of educational preparation of municipal mayors for the complex management practice they deal with. There are relatively few specialties that guarantee the possession of managerial knowledge and skills, and as mentioned, the Bulgarian mayor is not just a ceremonial figure.

If the division in the Classifier of the fields of higher education and the professional directions from 2003 is taken into account, the mayors with higher education are distributed as follows: pedagogical sciences - 16 people; humanitarian sciences - 13; social, economic and legal sciences - 85; natural sciences, mathematics, and informatics - 10; technical sciences - 56; agricultural sciences and veterinary medicine - 24; healthcare and sports - 21; arts - 1 and security and defense - 7.

Figure 6. Grouping of mayors by professional fields



Source: Personal research and calculations

The share of social, economic, and legal sciences is the highest, but it is far from what we could expect, as in this field all areas of science that create managerial knowledge and skills are gathered - law, economics, administration, and management, etc. The high share of technical sciences, agricultural sciences, and healthcare cannot fail to impress. This structure contradicts the European practices, where mayors with the so-called *speaking and brokerage* professions (lawyers, managers, public sector specialists, and teachers) predominate.

If the disciplines acquired by municipal mayors are observed in more detail, most of them are engineers within the narrower understanding (excluding those in mining, military engineers and those in the food industry) - 44 (or 16.6%, and still, again there is a decrease of about 2% compared to the previous mandate) and economists - 42 people, who together with those who received a degree in accounting are 51 (or 19.2%). They are followed by pedagogues and medics - 16 and 18 mayors, respectively, and veterinarians and foresters. There are only 17 lawyers (or 6.4% compared to 4.5% in the previous mandate).

In general, less than a third of mayors have a professional qualification in the field of speaking and brokerage professions. However, there is a visible growth compared to the 2018 survey. The outlined profile is quite different from that of the deputies in the National Parliament as of 2018. There are 11.3% lawyers, 21.3% economists, and 11.7% engineers.

Among the professional degrees exist "exotic" ones - theology, music, sports, biology, and others. Sciences such as philosophy, political science, journalism, geography are not presented. Of interest is also the type of education of the most elected mayors - those who are currently running for their sixth and seventh mandate. None of them is in its purest form a specialty preparing for a speaking or brokerage profession, or closely related to management skills.

Additional master's degrees, specializations, and qualifications have at least 15% of mayors (most often at the Academy of Economics in Svishtov, the University of Ruse, the University of National and World Economy, and two of the mayors have completed a qualification course at the former school for management for the socialist elites AONSU). Three mayors have additionally graduated from foreign educational institutions - in Russia, the United States, and France. One-third of these master's degrees and specializations were acquired during their mandate as mayor or while the future candidate was a municipal councilor.

The largest number of mayors graduated before their election is the mayors with a degree at the University of National and World Economy - 25 (or 9.4%), the Technical University in Sofia, and the Southwestern University in Blagoevgrad - 15 (5.7% each), and the Academy of Economics in Svishtov - 16 (6%), followed by the University of Plovdiv (14), Shumen (13), Thracian (12). The weak representation of Sofia University is impressive (only 10 mayors, but they have doubled since the last elections) which is in great contradiction with the representatives at the National Parliament. Regarding the Universities, there are some regional dependencies between the seat of the University and the municipalities, but they are not significant (to some extent this applies to the graduates of the University of Ruse, Thrace, and Veliko Tarnovo).

A total of 34 universities out of 52 are represented. In addition, six local representatives have graduated from foreign universities - in Skopje, Moscow, and Ukraine from the mayors elected before 2019 and in Denmark, Izmir, and the Sheffield University Representation in Thessaloniki from the newly elected mayors.

The professional experience of mayors before their election is diverse. Most of them have worked in their specialty, but there are also rare professional occupations - a football player, wrestler, basketball player, biathlon coach, professional pilot, bankers, sailors, hospital directors, agronomists, farmers, construction contractors, and others.

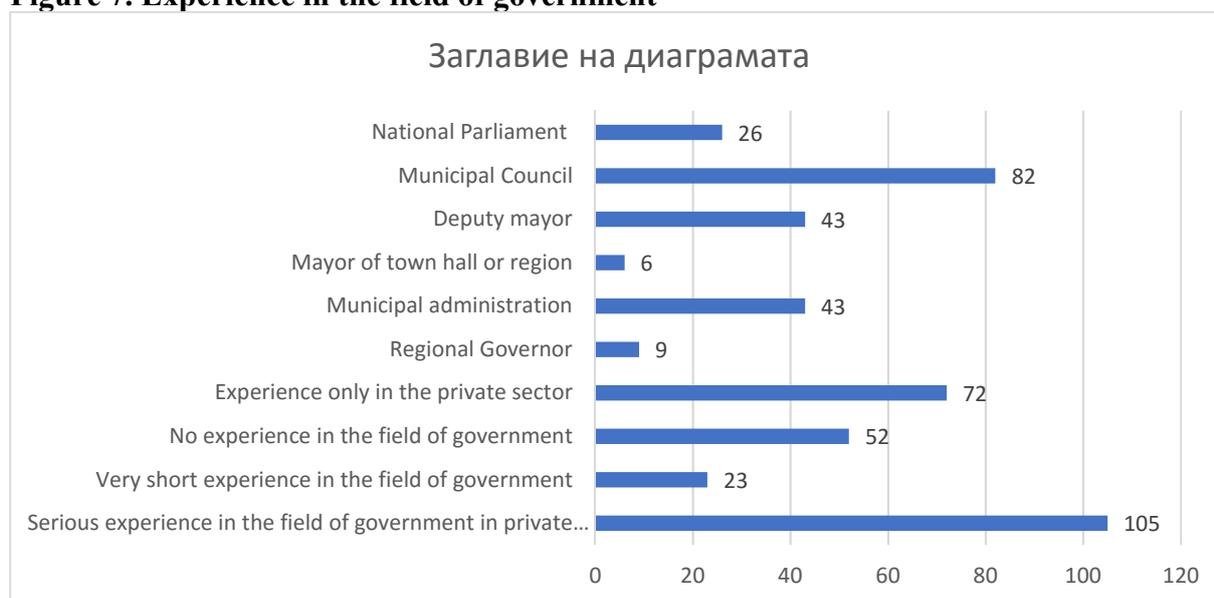
Experience in the field of government and political professionalization of mayors

Less than half of the current municipal mayors (105) have significant managerial experience in the public and/or private sector. This means that they have managed a certain organization (private

enterprise, hospital, school), that they have held a leading political position or position in the administration, that they have a proven realization in a certain sector. 52 of the elected mayors have almost no professional experience, and 72 have held low operational positions in the private sector. 82 of the mayors have experience as municipal councilors.

Relatively few mayors - 43, previously held positions in the municipal administration, and only six were mayors of town halls or regions. A continuity is observed in 43 of the municipalities and former deputy mayors have been elected. There were 26 deputies from the mayors and 9 regional governors. The total number exceeds 265 due to the fact that some of the mayors fall into more than one category. Although in isolated cases, there are also mayors of "political careerists", such as the mayor of Vratsa, Kalin Kamenov, who was elected at the age of 35 and has experience as a parliament member, deputy minister, chairman of a state agency, and others.

Figure 7. Experience in the field of government



Source: Personal research and calculations

On the other hand, the question of whether the municipal level is the first stage of the political career of the local representatives is also important. The mayor's career is empirically rich and diverse in European countries. But there are also some common characteristics regarding the profession and future ambitions. Most mayors build their entire political careers at the local level. They manage to establish themselves as local elites. However, not all mayors are limited to the local election arena. Although less common, it is not uncommon to see European mayors during elections at another level of government. In some European countries, such as France and Belgium, mayors accumulate both local and parliamentary mandates (cumulation of mandates).

However, there are two broader trends affecting European countries: first, the professionalization of local politics and the growing interconnections between the different levels, and second, the career opportunities increase with the processes of increasing regionalization and Europeanization, as there are elected positions in local, regional, regional, national, and European level. The existence of multi-level governance systems is reflected not only in the careers of mayors but also in their future ambition for other levels of government after the mayoral mandate. In Bulgaria, these trends are slow. Local political elites are rather closed.

26 of the current mayors have experience as National Parliament Members, one as a minister, and at the same time, 12 of the current MPs were once municipal mayors (5%). Most of them were not re-elected, although they ran (Dora Yankova, Slavcho Atanasov, Georgi Andreev, etc.), and others, such as Ahmed Ahmedov (3 terms mayor of Tsar Kaloyan, Razgrad region), did not run. Among

the members of the Council of Ministers, Prime Minister Boyko Borissov and Tomislav Donchev were mayors. Yordanka Fandakova was the only minister to resign to become mayor of Sofia. On average, 5-6 mayors become deputies in one parliament and leave the mayoral mandate ahead of schedule. This is a relatively low participation rate of local elites at the national level.

In the local elections in 2011, 8 MPs left the parliament to become mayors in 2013. In a partial vote, MP Ivan Portnih was elected mayor of Varna, all of them are mayors to this day. In 2015, there were six deputies elected mayors, the same number as in the 2019 elections - in the municipalities of Pernik, Razgrad, Ruse, Haskovo, Sandanski, and Asenovgrad. It is noteworthy that these are four regional centers and two large municipalities. One of the newly elected mayors (Jebel) has experience not only in the Bulgarian National Parliament but also in the European Parliament.

From the point of view of the political career of the mayors, four ideal types emerge: locally-oriented mayor - he/she has solid experience in local politics as a municipal councilor, deputy mayor, employee in the administration and once entered the mayor's office, makes a long professional career without interaction with the other levels; amateur mayor - mayors with a short career, showing a lack of professionalization of local politics, as he/she is typical for municipalities dominated by the institutional tradition of voluntary representatives; nationally oriented mayor - the mayor's office is perceived as a way for inclusion in the national party-political elites; and a mayor with a career at different levels within multilevel governance - he/she depends a lot on the national specifics and the number of management levels, implies alternation and accumulation of political mandates, with a high degree of professionalization.

Table 2. Models of careers at local level at European countries

	Locally-oriented career	
Nationally-oriented career	Nationally-oriented mayor	mayor with a career at different levels within multilevel governance
	Mayor amateur	Locally-oriented mayor

Source: Adapted by Kjaer, 2006.

The current empirical study shows that the Bulgarian municipal mayors belong to the group of locally-oriented mayors. They rarely seek a career at the national level and at the same time, they stay for a relatively long time as mayor and in Municipal Councils.

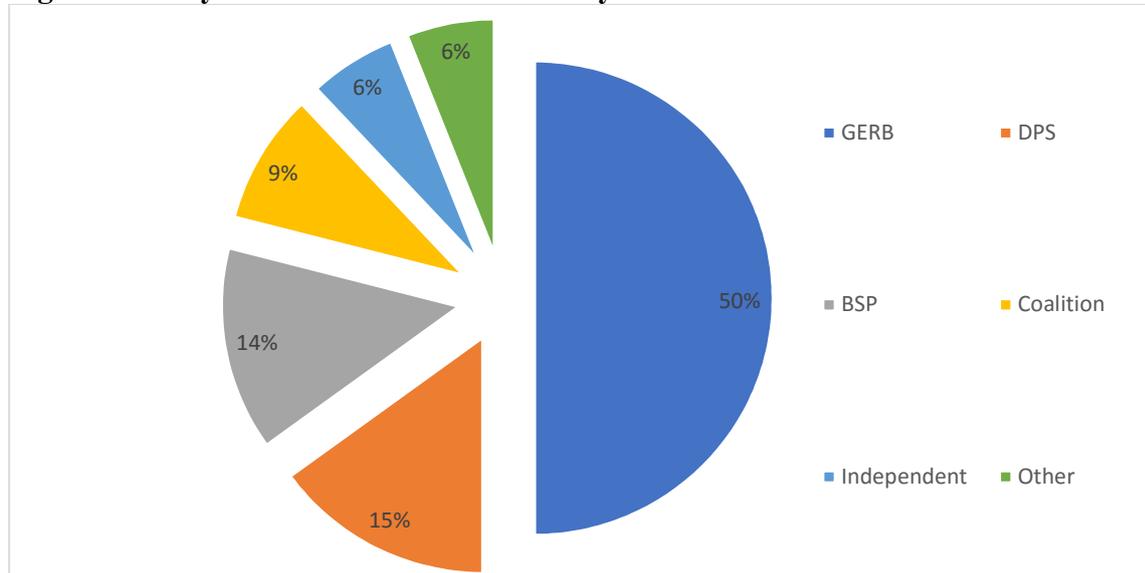
In most of the cases, the political parties serve as brokers or "doorkeepers" between the local and regional, and national political arenas. The best illustration of an "integrated" political class is probably the French and Belgian cases of *cumul des mandats*. The membership in political parties ranges from 39% for Greece and 40% for Poland to 100% in England, Austria, Lithuania, Sweden, and Iceland, with an average share of 74% for the European countries surveyed. 59% of mayors have experience in local councils, with the share being very high in Austria, Portugal, and Sweden and lower in Poland, Croatia, and Lithuania. The lowest share is in Slovenia - only 15%.

In Bulgaria, there is a relatively high share of municipal mayors belonging to political parties. All Bulgarian parties are based on local structures. The main units (one for each local community) are subordinated and coordinated by hierarchically arranged levels of municipal, regional, and national party structures. The procedures for nominating candidates for councilors and mayors are identical to those for MPs. These procedures are not usually fixed in the party's status, but are developed through discussion and are voted on at the party's highest forum.

In the last elections, the independent candidates of the parties represented in the National Parliament won more than 75% of the mayoral seats. The ruling party GERB, with two interruptions in the last 10 years, won half of the municipal seats (50.1%). Local coalitions, usually with the participation of a parliamentary force, win 12% of the seats. The number of independent

candidates nominated by initiative committees is only 6%, although the thresholds for nomination are symbolic. This shows that, although there is a strong majority principle in the election of a mayor and there are mayors with 5, 6, and 7 seats, they guarantee success only if they are supported by an influential political force.

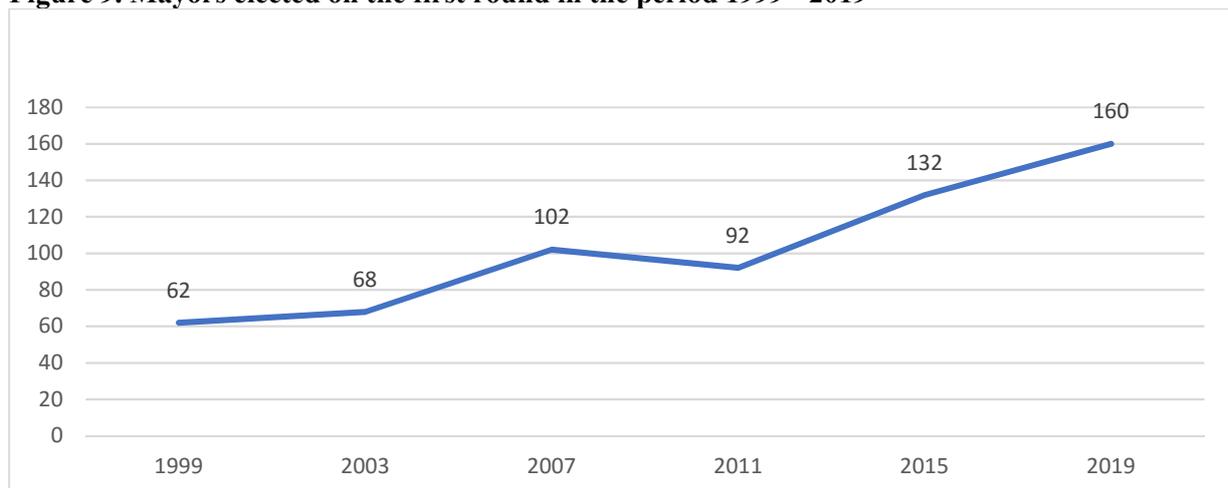
Figure 8. Party affiliation of the elected mayors in 2019



Source: Central Election Commission and personal research and calculations

A stable increase in mayors elected on the first round could be noticed. Out of 62 in the 1999 elections, in 2015 their number reached 132, or half of the municipal mayors, and 13 of them are in municipalities with a city that is a regional center. In the elections in the autumn of 2019, the number of those elected in the first round is 160 (or 60%). This extremely high share shows a conservative, stable vote in places. Almost a third of newly elected mayors (20 out of 67) also win in the first round.

Figure 9. Mayors elected on the first round in the period 1999 - 2019



Source: Central Election Commission and personal research and calculations

Finally, it is important to note something else indirectly related to the purpose of the study. In the social sciences, the rule "lack of information is important information" applies. It is extremely challenging to find public biographical data on the current municipal mayors. Municipal websites

rarely contain such information, nor is it available from election campaigns. This raises a number of questions about the argumentation of the choice made by the local voters.

Regarding the data on the municipalities mayors, the websites of the municipal administrations have serious deficits. The objectives of this article assumed the search for a name, age, education (including disciplines, graduation year, university), professional development and career, and other information about the mayor. Depending on whether they contain all these data, little or no part of them, the websites of the municipalities can be grouped as follows:

Sufficiently detailed and complete information about the mayor is available only on 24 sites. Even the name of the mayor cannot be found on 5 of the websites, and 103 of them contain only it. Such an approach does not contribute to the good public image of the mayor, as well as the selectively omitted data in some of the biographies. Very few mayors have personal websites or blogs. In most cases, they were created during the election campaign. The group of mayors with an active public and recognizable Facebook profile is also limited, offering biographical data and active communication with the citizens, which is key for a successful modern mayor.

The Institutional tradition of the mayor's position and main responsibilities

The term “mayor” could be found in sources from the XVII century („кметъ“ in Troyan region) and it means the head of rural or city municipality. Similar forms of the term could be found in other East and Central European languages: Serbo-Croatian, Czech, Polish (kmieć) languages with the meaning of old man, member of the rural court, respectful peasant. The prototype of the mayor in Bulgaria could be found in the position of Elder of the Slavic co-operative (zadruga). Similar figure in Bulgaria existed also during the First and the Second Bulgarian Empire (BAS, 2012, p. 3162 – 3163). During the Ottoman Empire, notably after the Provincial (Vilayet) reform, it was permitted for Bulgarian citizens to become mayors but a property and educational qualifications were introduced so that the richer can be mayors (BAS, 2012, p. 3162 – 3163). The Tarnovo Constitution adopted 1879 promulgated the principle of local self-government. The Temporary rules on municipal, urban and rural government, adopted in 1879, regulated the local authorities. They also regulated for the first time the form of property and educational qualification with regards to the mayor – to own a property and “to be educated”. According to the Law on Municipalities and City Government (1882), the mayor should be appointed by the central administration which strongly limited the democratic principle of self-government, proclaimed by the Tarnovo Constitution. By adopting two new legal acts in 1886 (Law on Urban Municipalities and Law on Rural Municipalities), the principle of municipal self-government was implemented. The Municipal Councils were elected directly by the population, their functions were broadened, and the collective principle of government was introduced. The mayor is already elected by the Municipal Council among its members and governs by right the local parliament. According to these legal acts the mayor is in a double legal position. On one hand, he is a municipal authority and as a representative of the executive power in the municipality he performed all decisions of the Municipal Council, and on the other side, he has also obligations on executing state functions locally.

After the 19 May coup d'état of 1934 all Municipal Councils were dismissed, the local self-government in the municipalities was liquidated and a deconcentrated local administration was established, a new legislation was implemented which formalized dependence of Municipal Councils by the central government (BAS, 2012, p. 3162 – 3163). The Councils lose their main functions, most of them provided to the mayor who became appointed by the Council of Ministers or by the Minister of Interior. The appointed by the central power mayor become the main authority locally and the Municipal Councils are transformed into consultative authority. Despite this dependence on the Government, this is the time when the most recognized and successful mayors in the Bulgarian history govern, including the mayor of the capital Sofia, Ivan Ivanov.

After 9th September 1944, the actual power locally was in the hands of the Fatherland Front committees. The Constitution of 1947 and the Law on People's Councils (1951) limited the possibility of local self-government. The Constitution of 1971 "softens" this a little, declaring the People's Councils to be also local self-government bodies, but without municipal property and status of legal entities there is no way to achieve real self-government. The institution of the mayor itself is completely depersonalized until 1978 when the amended Law on People's Councils introduces the "mayoralty" body, chaired by the mayor as part of a collective body but with symbolic functions. After the administrative-territorial reform of 1987, the powers of local authorities to resolve local problems are slightly broadened.

The real functions of the mayor's institution were restored in 1991 by adopting the new Constitution. For the first time in contemporary Bulgaria a legal possibility to direct election of the mayor by the local political community is being created. The first elections of local bodies of self-government are organized together with the elections for the 36th National Parliament of 13 October 1991. The second round of the election of 1991 is on 22nd, 26th, and 27th October. The elections are organized in 273 municipalities.

Election, powers and functions of the mayor

The local self-government and the local administration are regulated in first place in Chapter 7 of the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria, which stipulates that: the municipality is the main administrative-territorial unit in which the local self-government is carried out; the body of the local self-government in the municipality is the municipal mayor who is elected by the population; the body of the executive power in the municipality is the mayor who is elected by the population or by the Municipal Council for a 4 consecutive years mandate.

The Local Government and Local Administration Act (ALGLA, in force since 17.09.1991) stipulates that the municipality mayor is elected directly by the population for a period of 4 years under conditions determined by a law. The direct election of the mayor and its status of a body of the executive power in the municipality are confirmed also in the Law on the Administration of 1998. The election procedures are described in a first place in the Law on local elections and after 2011 in the unified Election Code. These are the main legal acts regulating powers, responsibilities, and election of the mayors. Several other specialized legislative acts and regulations, adopted by the 265 Municipal Councils, determine other different functions and responsibilities of the municipality mayor.

The powers of the municipality mayor are regulated in most detail in art. 44 of ALGLA. According to the legislation, the mayor of the municipality execute several groups of functions:

- Basic - manages the whole executive activity of the municipality; direct and coordinate the activity of the specialized executive bodies; maintains connections with the political parties, the public organisations and movements, as well as with other bodies of local government in the country and abroad; represents the municipality before individuals and corporate bodies and before the court;
- Human resources - he proposes structure and number of municipal administration; appoint to and discharge from the position the deputy mayors of the municipality, the secretary and the mayor's deputies; appoints to, discharges and displaces employees of the municipal administration; organizes the selection of the staff; organizes the qualification, the re-qualification and the training of the staff; imposes the disciplinary sanctions provided by the law;
- Budget and finance - he proposes a draft budget of the municipality; proposes solutions for actualisation of the budget; submits for discussion reports on the implementation of the budget; proposes municipal debt; organizes the implementation of the budget;

- Municipal property and economic activity - he organizes the implementation of Municipal Council's decisions for disposal of municipal property; organizes the implementation of the decisions for managing the municipal property;
- Spatial planning - he proposes drafts of general development plans and their amendments and organizes their implementation;
- Legislation-making and right to initiative - he proposes drafts of regulations, rules, strategies, programs, and plans; ensures the organisation – technical servicing of the Municipal Council and participates in its sessions with a voting right;
- Control - quarterly reports on the implementation of the decisions of the Municipal Council; returns for new discussion illegal or inappropriate decisions of the Municipal Council - one-time suspensive veto;
- Other functions - ensures the observation of the public order by issuing written orders, obligatory for the chiefs of the corresponding structures of the Ministry of Interior; chairs the Council for Security; implements the functions of an official for the civil status; assists the condominium owners and their managing bodies.

The acts of the mayor of the municipality can be appealed under administrative procedure before the regional governor unless otherwise provided in law. The Municipal Council can revoke administrative acts, issued by the mayor of the municipality, which disagree with acts, adopted by the Council, within 14 days after their acceptance. Within the same term, the Council can dispute the unlawful administrative acts, issued by the mayor of the municipality, before the respective administrative court. The mayor of the municipality can bring back for reconsideration unlawful or inappropriate acts of the Municipal Council or dispute the unlawful acts before the respective administrative court and claim suspension of the implementation of general administrative acts and the application of sub-legislative legal acts. The Municipal Council can revoke, amend or, re-adopt the act brought back for reconsideration. The act brought back for reconsideration, shall be adopted again with the majority, provided in law, but not less than more than half of the total number of the municipal councilors.

The right to elect municipal councilors and mayors is foreseen for Bulgarian citizens who have reached the age of 18, including on the election day, who are not placed under guardianship, who have not served a prison sentence and who have lived in the respective settlement at least the last 6 months. Every EU Member State citizen who is not Bulgarian citizen has the right to vote under the same conditions, has a status of a long term or permanent resident in the Republic of Bulgaria and is not deprived of the right to vote in the EU Member State of which he is a citizen.

The requirements to the candidates for municipal councilors and mayors are the same as for passive suffrage. In addition to the usual incompatibilities, the Election Code provides a residency requirement - to be resident in the relevant settlement at least for the last 6 months. The powers of the mayor arise from the moment of taking the oath and he has all the rights under an employment contract except those that are incompatible with his position according to the law.

Typology of local self-government systems

A big part of the comparative and national surveys on local self-government begins with the classification of the local self-government bodies. Most often, this typology of local self-government systems is grouped along two dividing lines:

- a) **vertical** - relations between the municipalities and the central power;
- b) **horizontal** – the distribution of powers inside the self-government and notably between the local councils and the mayors, including for managing the municipal administration (Heinelt, Hlepas, 2006, p. 21).

The most used typology of European local government systems regarding the line *central - local power* is developed by Page and Goldsmith (1987), who distinguish between Southern and

Northern European Systems; and Hesse and Sharpe (1991) who distinguish between Southern, Northern and Anglo-Saxon models. The attempts to include the Eastern part of the continent are very few and usually, they consider the whole region as one separate group. Page and Goldsmith make a difference between North and South Europe having in mind the link between the number and type of functions distributed at the subregional level, the legal freedom of action of the local authorities, and the access of local politicians to the central power. Their main thesis is that the systems of local government in South Europe are characterized by municipalities with few functions and competencies, low freedom as regards the central power and high access of local politicians to the central (and regional) level of government. In other words, the local politicians could be strong at the central level, but they represent politically weak municipalities. As opposed to this system, the North European local government is characterized by strong decentralization of functions, a high level of independence, and low access of local politicians to the central power. This typology is clear and avoids the typical juridical approach of the traditional institutionalism which predominates a long time ago in comparative governmental analysis (including at local level). Instead of that, the typology is inspired by sociological and especially historical institutionalism. Despite that, the observation only of unitary countries and the too-large grouping could be identified as disadvantages. If Bulgaria should be included in one of these broaden groups, the country should be placed as part of the Southern model in terms of the power and competencies of local authorities as regards to the central power, although the access of local politicians to the central power is relatively low as it is in the Northern model (this also has been proven by the empirical research made for the purposes of this article).

The first part of the second popular typology - the one of Hesse and Sharpe - is the *Franco group* which (in some circumstances) corresponds to the Southern group in the typology of Page and Goldsmith. In this case, it is presumed that the local authorities encompass territorial communities with moderate independence and form structures for mediation of territorial interests at a higher level of government. It is expected that the mayor represents the interests of this community in regard to the higher government levels. France, Italy, Belgium, Spain, Portugal, and Greece belong to this group.

The second part of the typology is the *Anglo-Saxon group* which includes Great Britain and Ireland (also Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the USA in a sense). In political systems of these countries, the local government has a weak legal and political status, but it has an important role in forming and providing public services. This is reflected in the weak positions of the mayor as a political leader as well as in the power of the administration and the councilors with regards to the services and policies.

The third cluster is the group of North and Middle Europe with the Scandinavian countries, Germany, Netherlands, Austria, and Switzerland. Although, in this case, the focus is on providing public services (as in the Anglo-Saxon group) the local authorities are perceived institutionally (with strong constitutional status and relatively high financial independence) as a decentralized level for independent policies.

Bulgaria could be included in this context to the southern countries, but with a lot of reservations. Later classifications include also the Central and East European countries as a unified group and the differences between them with regards to the institutionalization of regional and local government are obvious. Of course, there is no doubt, the local government systems in the Eastern part of the continent share some common features, and their roots could be identified in the historical past before and after 1989. These similarities include a belief in the ideas of decentralization which almost identify the democratization and weakness in the government at middle level (above the municipal level). This is opposite to the dominant tendency in most of the West Europe democracies where regional levels were created or strengthened in the last 20 - 30 years.

Nevertheless, the differences are too big and the group needs additional sections. Pavel Swianiewicz (Swianiewicz, 2014) is trying to compensate for the gap resulting from the simplification in these typologies by suggesting a very comprehensive picture of variations in East European countries which covers 20 countries. He includes both vertical and horizontal distinguishing lines of earlier classifications of Western systems. Criteria are: territorial organization and levels of elected subnational authorities; local authorities functions' scope (functional decentralization); financial autonomy; power horizontal relations in local institutions (election systems and relations between the mayors and the councils).

Swianiewicz studies in detail key indicators as a level of local expenditures as a share of GDP, amount of local loans, the scope of competencies of municipalities, etc. One of its main indicators is the size of the municipalities and their grouping by number in 4 groups. The author indicates that countries such as Lithuania, Georgia, Serbia, and Bulgaria are one of the biggest in Europe with regards to the average size of local self-government units, and in the same time, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Armenia, and Azerbaijan are most departmentalized on a local level. In the end, 5 groups of countries are formed: type 1 - Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia; type 2 - the Czech Republic, Estonia, and Latvia; type 3 - Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, North Macedonia, Moldova, Romania, Slovenia, and Ukraine; type 4 - Georgia, Lithuania, and Serbia; type 5 - Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Bulgaria falls in the middle third group. With some simplifications, this cluster could be called *Balkan*, as most of the countries classified in this type are located in the Balkans (although the group also includes Ukraine). In every one of these countries, the attempts to reforms in decentralizations have been made at different periods and with different levels of success. The local authorities' functions' scope is narrower than in type 1 and type 2. Thanks to this criterion and to the geographical location, this type is closer to the South Europe model, identified in previous classifications. The level of financial independence in type 3 is also lower than in type 1 and type 2. The common feature of the countries grouped in type 3 is the direct election of the mayors (in some countries, like Croatia, implemented later) and a model of strong personal leadership. A proportional electoral system is used to elect the collective body (Swianiewicz, 2014).

One of the main criteria to measure the democracy of the local power is the ratio in the competencies and power functions of the Municipal Council and the mayor. In all systems, the Council is perceived as a legislation-making and representative body, while the mayor is charged with various executive functions. The typologies of horizontal relations of the power at local government level focus on the role and distribution of tasks between the mayor, the municipality, and the municipal administration. One common distinction reflects the legally regulated distribution of tasks between legislative and executive functions. The focus of these typologies is most commonly on: a) the role of the mayor in carrying out the executive power; b) the relative independence of the mayor from the collective body or he is part of it, and c) the way the mayor is elected.

One of the most widely cited classifications is based on the American institutional tradition and defines four types of mayoral institution (Mouritzen, Svava, 2002):

- Strong Mayor – Council: In addition to implementing the council acts and managing the administration, the mayor possesses enough mechanisms to influence the agenda of the collective body, to elaborate the budget, and to dispose of municipal property. Usually, this involves the direct election of the mayor by the local political community;
- Weak Mayor – Council: The mayor is appointed by the Council or is elected by the population but has limited administrative and ceremonial functions. He could also be a chairman of the collective body;
- Council – Administrator: The mayor elected by the Council has only operational-management competencies;

- Collective executive body: It is elected by the Council among the municipal counselors or outside of it.

The positioning of the Bulgarian municipal mayor in this typology is not easy due to some discrepancies between the regulatory powers and the actual practice. The earlier studies (Stefanova, 2003) are based on the formal structure of the mayoral institution and thus implies defining it as weak. But the practice in the next years leads to gradual development towards strong mayoral power (Stefanova 2006; Stefanova 2007). This conclusion is significantly strengthened also by the mayor's influence in executing other powers determined by the law which are outside of the scope of the local self-government. According to Milena Stefanova, the first area is connected to the administrative capacity building in the context of staff selection, appointment, and control as by generating expert potential it can and does influence the setting of development priorities for the municipalities. In the area of human resources, the competencies of the mayor are almost full. In the second place, for the analysis of the power balance between the Municipal Council and the mayor the disposal of financial resources is important as well as the management and disposal of municipal property. A strong influence also has the expertise of the mayor and the administration. In case of a low level of managing capacity, it is very likely the intervention of the Municipal Council in drafting the budget.

Third, creating rules for regulating the relations in the community is a key precondition for the public interest protection. The influence that the mayor and the administration have on the legislation-making process in the practice is very essential. The competencies areas of local self-government are so varied that it is very unlikely the Municipal Council to possess regulatory and managing capacity which reflects the needs of qualified legal competence or specialized competence in any field. The Law on Local Government and Local Administration don't envisage the right to legislative initiative of the municipality mayor. However, the practice is different. The drafts of legislative documents of municipal importance in most of the cases are submitted by the mayor and are prepared in advance by the municipal administration (Stefanova, 2017).

Other typologies focus more on the legitimacy and the representation of the local executive bodies. Based on the traditional ideal types of executive power on a national level in the comparative constitutional analysis and the difference between monistic and dualistic sources of power, as well as the decision-making process (including according to the type of the electoral system - proportional or majority), Bäck (Bäck, 2005, p. 82 - 83) proposes the following typology:

- Executive body as an Assembly - the executive power is in the hands of the Committee proportionally elected by the Council;
- Parliamentarism - a combination of Monism and Majoritarianism - this is an executive director, appointed by the Council in accordance with the principle of majority;
- Presidentialism - a separately elected mayor who appoints his own staff without necessarily taking into account the party-political composition of the Council. In this way, the dualistic and the majority principles are combined;
- Semi-presidentialism - the mayor is complemented by an executive director, appointed by the Council in a complex balance of competencies.

Within this typology, the Bulgarian mayoral institution resembles the semi-presidential type. His functions are not very broad and as an example, according to the current legislation the Municipal Council is convened at a meeting by its Chairman - on his/her initiative; by a request of one-third of municipal councilors; by a request of one-fifth of the voters of the municipality; by a request of the regional governor. Obviously, the legislator didn't envisage this possibility of influence on the mayor which reduces his weight in the complex balance with the Municipal Council.

Based on these typologies, Heinelt and Hlepas (Heinelt and Hlepas, 2006) call for exploring part of the horizontal dependencies with the central power in defining the role of the mayoral institution.

According to the authors, this is important due to the philosophical and practical transition from the concept of local government to the concept of local governance and the (possible) subsequent challenge for the municipal leadership in the field of local management. They also distinguish four groups, two of them are strongly close to the collegial (collective) bodies and the form *Council - Manager*. Heinelt and Hlepas don't separate the form "a weak mayor" but together with the manager, they classify it to the so-called *ceremonial leader*. The other two types, in practice, are a breakdown of the form "a strong mayor" with regards to the scope of the local competencies:

- Political mayors belong to the strong mayor form of the local power and act in conditions where the municipalities are responsible only for the relatively limited scope of functions and the mayors are also political representatives (agents) of the local community in the relations with the upper levels of governance (for instance France, Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain);
- Executive mayors also belong to the strong mayor but they govern a municipal administration responsible for a very wide range of policies and public services (Hungary, Germany, Poland).

This distinction allows the Bulgarian municipal mayor to be understood as a political mayor who is directly elected by the population and thus has a high level of legitimacy but he is limited both in the balance with the Municipal Council and by the scope of its functions. As it was already mentioned, the functional - and especially the financial decentralization in Bulgaria are still limited.

At the same time, Pavlovska and Radzik (2007) distinguish *three practical models of local leadership and governance* by the mayors: technocratic, bureaucratic, and transforming. The technocratic model is oriented to providing services and has a weaker political side. This model is typical for the Scandinavian countries. The bureaucratic model is characterized by a strong institutionalization of leader and political relations. The local leader has stable political support by the party majority in the local council. The local functions are mostly administrative thus this form is bureaucratic. The bureaucratic leadership is typical for the South European countries. Bulgaria could be included in this group. The transforming model is characterized by a weak institutionalization of the leadership. Providing services is of key importance for the local leader but the political discourse also looks important. The change in the leadership is not in the existing legal and institutional order but is the result of either the dissatisfaction and pressure of citizens or the impact of national policy. This leadership can be found in the United Kingdom and Ireland.

The current trend is to establish a local policy that is developed by building models of partnership with numerous partners - public, private, and non-governmental. This supposes an increase in requirements for the professional training and qualities of the Bulgarian municipal mayors.

Regarding the role and the place of regional and local authorities, including the type and scope of the mayoral institution, the European integration does not lead to convergence of models, and they depend mainly on the institutional tradition and other local factors, and this is relevant also for the new EU Member States of Central and Eastern Europe. Of interest for the present study are the similarities and differences of Bulgarian municipalities and local authorities with other EU countries.

One of the first comparative questions is about the size of the territorial communities.

The question of exactly how many inhabitants the mayor represents is key to his legitimacy and relationship with citizens. Bulgaria is one of the countries with a relatively large municipal level. On average, one mayor represents over 27,000 citizens, and the municipalities with a population of over 10,000 are almost half of all. Among the countries with a high proportion of population and municipalities are the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Ireland, Sweden, Greece, and Lithuania. On the opposite side are countries such as the Czech Republic, Slovakia, France, Portugal, Cyprus, and others.

The delineation of the place and the role of the municipal mayor also depends on the forms of government and state structure of the countries. Of the 28th EU Member States, only three are

federal - Austria, Belgium, and Germany. The other 25 countries are unitary, and some specifics of the United Kingdom must be taken into account.

An interesting question is whether the number and the scope of sub-national levels of self-government influence the scope of functions and the manner of electing the municipal mayors. There are three levels of self-government in 5 European countries - France, Germany, Poland, Italy, and Belgium. There can be no serious similarity or difference between these countries and the others in terms of the functions of the mayors. In Italy and Germany, the mayor is elected directly by the population, and in France and Poland, he is appointed by the Municipal Council. In Belgium, there are regional differences in this respect. However, the presence of several levels dynamizes the local political elites and this leads to higher professionalization of mayors and alternation and a combination of mandates, which inevitably affects the social profile of mayors.

At the same time, the trend towards regionalization is visible in the EU. Only seven countries do not have an intermediate level of self-government - Bulgaria, Slovenia, Malta, Luxembourg, Cyprus, Lithuania, and Estonia. The lack of a regional or district level of self-government is relatively easy to understand in small countries such as Lithuania, Estonia, or Slovenia, but the same is observed in larger countries such as Bulgaria. In fact, Bulgaria is the largest country without regional self-government. The development of the regional level of government represents both a change in its institutional organization and a change in the functions it has performed so far (Kalfova, 2014). Countries of the size of Bulgaria have between 5 (Denmark) and 19 (Hungary) regional levels.

In principle, the existence of a regional level of self-government does not affect the way the mayors are elected, as in only two countries - Romania and Slovakia, the regional governor is elected directly by the population. In these two countries, it is obvious that a high legitimacy of the local elites is sought, as the election of a mayor is also the result of a direct vote.

The mayors are elected directly by the population in 12 countries - Bulgaria, Croatia, Slovenia, Slovakia, Romania, Poland, and Lithuania with 4 years mandate; in Hungary, Italy, Cyprus, and Greece for 5 years, and in Germany with a mandate for 4 to 9 years according to the regional specific.

Of the countries without regional self-government, only Bulgaria, Lithuania, and Slovenia directly elect a mayor. In 13 countries, the mayor is appointed by Municipal Councils - the Netherlands, France, Luxembourg, Sweden (collective body), the Czech Republic, Finland (with or without a mandate), Portugal, Malta, Latvia, Denmark, Estonia, Ireland, and Spain. In most countries, the mandate is 4 years, but in some, it varies between 1 (Ireland) and 6 years (Netherlands, France, Luxembourg). In the rest three countries - Austria, the United Kingdom, and Belgium the both forms of election are acceptable and observed.

The mayor is not and has no right to be a member of the Municipal Council in Bulgaria, although he attends its meetings in an advisory capacity. The meetings are organized and chaired by a Chairman elected among the councilors. In most European countries the logic is the opposite and the interesting thing is that this is also observed in countries with direct election of the mayor by the population. The mayor is unconditionally also a Chairman of Municipal Councils in Latvia, Austria, the United Kingdom, Germany, Spain, Cyprus, Lithuania, Portugal, Slovakia, Hungary, the Netherlands, and the Czech Republic. He is also a member of the local council in Estonia (it is explicitly stated that he cannot be chairman), Luxembourg, Malta, he may be a member of the Municipal Council or not in Finland - there are only 2 cases of membership in 2015, and in Sweden, he is a collective body of municipal councilors.

Table 3. Local and regional self-government in EU Member States

	Population	Territory	Regional self-government	Municipalities 2016	Municipalities 2012	Proportion of population/number of municipalities	Mayor - election and mandate
Austria	8507786	83879	9 regions (landers)	2100	2357	4052	Municipal Council or directly according to the region
Belgium	11203992	30528	10 provinces, 3 districts, 3 regions	589	589	19023	Municipal Council or directly - 6
Bulgaria	7245677	111002	NO	265	264	27343	Directly - 4
United Kingdom	64308261	248528	4	419	433	153480	Municipal Council or directly - 4
Germany	80780000	357340	295 districts and 16 landers	11313	11481	7141	Directly - 4 to 9
Greece	10992589	131957	13	325	325	33823	Directly 5
Denmark	5627235	42921	5	98	98	57421	Municipal Council - 4
Estonia	1315819	45227	NO	213	226	6178	Municipal Council - 4
Ireland	4604029	69797	3, until recently 8	126	80	36540	Municipal Council - 1
Spain	46507760	505970	19	8176	8169	5689	Municipal Council - 4
Italy	60782668	302073	110 medial and 20 regions	8006	8094	7593	Directly - 5
Cyprus	858000	9251	NO	380	380	2258	Directly - 5
Latvia	2001468	64573	5 for planning new	119	119	16820	Municipal Council - 4
Lithuania	2943427	65300	NO	60	60	49058	Directly - 4
Luxembourg	549680	2586	NO	105	106	5186	Municipal Council - 6
Malta	425384	316	NO	68	68	6256	Municipal Council - 4
Poland	38495659	312679	380 districts and 16 voivodeships	2479	2479	15529	Directly - 4
Portugal	10427301	92225	2 autonomous regions	3400	4567	3066	Municipal Council - 4
Romania	19942642	238391	41	3181	3181	6270	Directly - 4
Slovakia	5415949	49035	8	2930	2930	1849	Directly - 4
Slovenia	2061085	20273	NO	212	211	9723	Directly - 4
Hungary	9879000	93024	19	3201	3177	3087	Directly - 5
Finland	5451280	338435	18, before 2	313	336	17417	Municipal Council - on mandate or no
France	65856609	632834	99 medial and 16 perregional	36658	36700	1797	Municipal Council - 6
Netherlands	16829289	41540	12	390	418	43153	Municipal Council and Government - 6
Croatia	4246700	56594	21 districts	555	556	7652	Directly - 4
Czech Republic	10512419	78867	14	6258	6250	1680	Municipal Council - 4
Sweden	9644864	438574	20	290	290	33259	Municipal Council, collective body

Source: Local and Regional Governments in Europe Structures and Competences (2016) and personal calculations

Conclusion

The Bulgarian municipal mayor has a long institutional tradition and his role is limited or strengthened in different periods. Its competencies as an executive body in the municipality are relatively broad within the unfinished process of real local decentralization. The institutional practice since 1991 has gradually strengthened the position of a "strong" mayor.

In addition to acting as an administrative service provider, the mayor's institution in modern democratic society also serves to promote and protect the interests of local citizens and communities, facilitate citizen participation in the decision-making process and the conduct of public affairs. Presumably, the mayors are called upon to serve as intermediaries between the local units and the central government, as well as to manage public resources effectively. In the current conditions, it is becoming increasingly important for local leaders to create an attractive investment environment and the impression that they are solving the problems of the local population. Different institutions reflect different norms and social expectations regarding formal and informal rules for local leadership.

Therefore, the perception of the leadership role involves a complex mix of competencies, behavior, context, and political culture. The mayors are expected to make effective local decisions and bring the necessary political legitimacy to local authorities. In a complex and dynamic environment, the local leaders can no longer use traditional strategies, such as promises of effective administrative management of local tasks, old-fashioned management of local utilities, or slow adoption of public impulses to solve problems. In such circumstances, the debate on the role functions of mayors, their management styles, their connection to local and national political networks and their social base, including education and professional skills, will become increasingly important.

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