

BULGARIA AND THE EUROPEAN UNION: CULTURAL DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

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Introduction

During its Post-Communist history, Bulgaria has been moving towards democracy and a free market economy. The country submitted the official application for membership in the European Community in 1995, and, after the implementation of reforms, was admitted to the EU in 2007, integrating its trade, investment, social and political relations with the EU members. Having minimized economic obstacles for goods and investment flows, the country still faces multiple barriers for productive collaboration with other EU countries. These barriers stem from differences not only at the level of economic development but also from distinctive cultural divides that separate Bulgaria from other European countries.

Understanding cultural *similarities* with other EU members helps strengthen collaboration efforts, while acknowledging *differences* helps address “frictions”. Hence, a cross-cultural analysis of Bulgaria within the European Union’s cultural space has both theoretical and practical applications.

This research defines Bulgaria’s cultural profile relative to other EU countries’ profiles. Focusing on Bulgaria in cross-cultural research, the article provides arguments in support of the cultural profile methodology and its relevance to the Bulgarian case. It places this profile into a broader comparative framework based on the Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE) cross-cultural research (House et al. 2004) and provides empirical evidence that differentiates between EU countries that are more culturally similar to Bulgaria and EU countries with greater cultural differences. The article concludes with theoretical implications and policy recommendations.

Bulgarian Culture in Social Research

The country’s population (est. 7.05 million in 2018) is culturally homogenous, as over 85% of its citizens declare themselves to be Bulgarians. Its culture is shaped by history, language commonalities (a South Slavic language of the Indo-European family), shared beliefs (religious and political), and ethnic heritage. Minkov and Hofstede, who conducted an analysis of European regions clustered on measures of values, confirmed that 75 percent of Bulgaria’s regions form homogenous and clearly delineated clusters with the remaining leaning towards other diverse East European regions (2014). Bulgaria has few distinctive subcultures that may blend with the other countries (for example, Turks and

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Roma²); however, those are in relative minority and do not change the dominant Bulgarian ethnicity (Minkov and Hofstede 2012). Comprehensive empirical research on Bulgarian societal culture and its impact on the country's organizational practices, as well as positioning this culture in a cross-cultural space, has been limited due to restrictions to the access of empirical data from broad groups of respondents in the previously Communist-controlled society, delayed imports of Western organizational know-how, as well as traditional suspicion towards surveys and behavioral research in a conformist Bulgarian environment. Bulgaria was not included in the classical cross-cultural studies by Hofstede (1980), Trompenaars (1998), Schwartz (1992) or GLOBE research (House et al. 2004) and only recently has the World Values Survey and European Social Survey added data on Bulgaria to their databases.

Davidkov (2004) summarized the results of empirical studies of Bulgarian culture conducted by Bulgarian researchers. His research displayed a diverse methodological base on cultural studies of Bulgaria and explained that some scholars such as Todorov, Chadarova, Kabakchieva developed their original methodology while other researchers acquired either Hofstede's (1980) methodology (Kolarova, Minkovski, Vedur), or Trompenaars' (1998) methodology (Ivanova, Duraknev, Marinov, Katrandzhiev, Stoianova), or a combination of both (Gerganov, Silgiszhan, Genopov).

Most findings assessed Bulgarian societal culture alongside cultural dimensions developed by Hofstede (1980) that currently dominate cross-cultural research. The profile emphasized behavioral patterns such as strong uncertainty avoidance, high power distance, and moderate individualism. The latter observations were supported by Karabel'ova's results of the 2010 survey that Bulgarian culture has "dominant individualistic" societal attributes (2011, 295). These results, however, deviated from Minkov's study that revealed lower individualism in Bulgarian organizations (2002). Karabel'ova's survey also confirmed power distance attributes "oriented rather towards the maintenance of social inequality with dominant strict control and directive style of management" (2011, 293) but found "low tolerance of uncertainty and high level of stress" that require consistent rules and legal framework in a society (2011, 301). Davidkov's comparison of the results of the surveys conducted in 2001 and 2008 also confirmed distinctions of Bulgarian culture such as high power distance and moderate gender egalitarianism along with a shift towards higher tolerance of uncertainty (2009). Overall, Bulgarian culture-focused studies present a distinctive aggregate profile of society, albeit with visible deviations of results in selected dimensions.

The comparative stream of cross-cultural studies responded to the analysis of the transfer of Western organizational and management know-how to Bulgaria that accompanied the inflow of multinational companies into the country's economy. These selected studies focused on the differences between Bulgarian and European partners in prevailing norms, values, and practices. For example, Michailova and Hollishead, (2009) in their analysis of Western assistance to Post-Communist Bulgaria, emphasized different levels of acceptance of innovations by different age groups. Comparisons with the Netherlands and Hungary on work motivation displayed Bulgarians' reduced

² With 8.8% in Bulgaria's population, Turks constitute the largest Turkish minority in the EU by percentage of total population, and Roma account for 4.9%.

responsiveness, downplaying feedback, and viewing extrinsic factors as sources of commitment (Roe et al. 2000). Comparisons with Austria in functional areas (such as marketing) highlighted Bulgarians' skepticism, sensitivity to perceived manipulation, reserved responses to advertising (Petrovici et al. 2007), and comparisons to Hungary and Romania explained that Bulgarian's lower fashion consciousness and higher dress conformity especially among the older population was due to relatively lower individualism and modest standards of living (Manrai et al. 2001).

While multiple studies have been conducted to reveal and analyze Bulgarian cultural distinctions in language, art, or demographic traditions of research, this particular analysis follows the mainstream pattern of comparative studies of values and behaviors in a society. The article follows the methodology of the 62-society GLOBE study³ (House et al. 2004) that aggregated previous comprehensive cross-cultural research projects (Hofstede 1980; McClelland 1985; Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck 1961; Triandis 1995). In the GLOBE study, societal cultural profiles were measured separately but consistently in terms of two manifestations of culture: modal practices ("as is") and modal values ("should be") of collectives. Cultural values and practices were measured on a 7-point response scale with respect to nine cultural dimensions⁴ that displayed high within-culture and within-organization agreement and high between-culture and between-organization differentiation. Sampling from managers permitted generalizations to reflect a broader culture in which managers operated.

The focused study of Bulgarian societal culture within the European Union cultural space presented in this article incorporates data collected and reported at the earlier stages of the project (Bobina and Sabotinova 2015, 2017; Bobina et al. 2017). Consistent with the methodology and traditions of the GLOBE research, a survey of managers has been conducted in Bulgaria. The original English version of the GLOBE questionnaire has been translated into the Bulgarian language and tested with back and forth translation conducted by two different teams of native speakers. 417 middle managers of Bulgarian firms in major cities of Burgas, Sofia, Plovdiv and Varna have been accessed through several professional and business networks in 2014–2015 (30% questionnaire response rate). The average age of respondents was 41.8 years; among them, 40.8% were men and 59.2% were women. On average, respondents had been employed for 18.1 years, and reported 14.9 years of formal education. Furthermore, 42 respondents (33.6 %) had received formal training in Western management techniques and practices. Functionally, 30 respondents (24%) worked in general administration and planning; 9 (7.2%) in research, engineering, technical support or production; 15 (12%) in finance and accounting; 13 (10.4%) in human resources management; 47 (35%) in marketing, sales or purchasing; and 11 (8.8%) in after-sales services. While all respondents spoke the Bulgarian language in their organizations, other languages were spoken such as English (46 respondents or 34%), Russian (24 or 19%), German (6 or 4.8%) and French (3 or 2.4%).

³ The author served as a Country Co-Investigator in the GLOBE research project.

⁴ Uncertainty Avoidance (UA), Future Orientation (FO), Power Distance (PD), Institutional Collectivism (IC), Humane Orientation (HO), Performance Orientation (PO), Group Collectivism (GC), Gender Egalitarianism (GE), Assertiveness (AS).

Sampling from middle managers permitted the generalization of the subculture of middle managers in Bulgaria, and increased the internal validity of the study by ensuring the homogeneity of the sample. However, the design of the GLOBE project, in particular through a combination of anthropological and psychological/behavioral traditions of culture assessment, a broader range of variables that were not often considered in cross-cultural theories increased the generalizability of these findings beyond the culture of middle managers alone towards the creation of a societal cultural profile.

Hence, the results of this study may contribute to research on similarities and differences of Bulgarian societal culture in the broader context of the European Union's cultural space. The analysis of the empirical data permitted the creation of Bulgaria's societal culture profile and its comparison to the cultural profiles of 17 European Union member countries (out of 28 members) and two candidate countries (out of 5) that were included in the original GLOBE study (Appendix 1). These countries accounted for about 88% of the EU population and represented all of the major European cultural clusters: Anglo, Germanic, Nordic, East European, and Latin European (House et al. 2004, 183-186).

Bulgaria's Culture: Societal Profile

The empirical study revealed a distinctive profile of Bulgaria's societal culture in terms of typical behaviors (practices, "as is") and in terms of value orientations ("should be"). It further permitted the comparisons of these data to the EU average scores as displayed in Figure 1 and generated predictions for the impact of culture on Bulgaria's economic health and its cooperation with its EU partners.

One of the general observations of Bulgaria's cultural profile is the sharp contrast between data based on perceived behaviors and data based on values. This gap is most visible in low scores on practices ("as is") vs. high scores on values ("should be") on Future Orientation, Performance Orientation, Uncertainty Avoidance and Humane Orientation as well as in high scores on practices ("as is") vs. low scores on values ("should be") on Power Distance. These findings may be interpreted in as indicators of the deep cultural transformation that the country and its people have been experiencing in the Post-Communist era along with aspirations for substantial change in current organizational practices.

The second general observation displays deviations from the EU average scores most visibly in practices on lower Uncertainty Avoidance and Future Orientation and higher Group Collectivism and Gender Egalitarianism, and in values on lower Uncertainty Avoidance and Future Orientation and higher Group Collectivism, Gender Egalitarianism and Power Distance. These differences translate into "cultural frictions" that impact effective interactions in international trade and investment, productive negotiations, and the implementation of collaborative projects, and into demand for additional resources and skills to address those "frictions".

Since in comparative research differences between societies should be studied along with similarities, the third general observation is the compatibility of select Bulgarian scores with the EU-averaged scores in practices on Assertiveness, Performance Orientation, Humane Orientation and Institutional Collectivism, and in values on Gender Egalitarianism, Humane Orientation, Institutional Collectivism, and Power Distance.

These similarities serve as contributors to effective cross-cultural interactions and add to productive cooperation between Bulgaria and other EU countries.

The combination of differences and similarities when compared to the EU data forms the unique societal culture profile of Bulgaria. The discussion of the findings on each separate GLOBE dimension follows. Figures 2 (behavior-tied data) and 3 (values-tied data) display Bulgaria's position on each dimension compared to other EU countries that participated in the GLOBE research.

Uncertainty Avoidance is the extent to which members of the organization or society strive to avoid uncertainty by relying on social norms, rituals, and bureaucratic practices to alleviate the unpredictability of future events. Following the conceptualization of Uncertainty Avoidance by Cyert and March (1963), Hofstede made it one of his classical cultural dimensions (1980), and Triandis distinguished between tight and loose cultures, explaining the domination of rules and conformism in the former case (1989). At the societal level, this dimension correlates with innovation and risk-taking; and Uncertainty Avoidance practice scores positively correlate with a country's economic health data (House 2004: 631).

Bulgaria's scores on Uncertainty Avoidance display a striking distance between practices and values as perceived by the members of the society. This gap on Uncertainty Avoidance (practices 3.11 vs. values 5.52) is the most visible among all of Bulgaria's data on the GLOBE-tied dimensions of culture. When compared to average scores for the EU countries, "as is" responses are the lowest among those countries and much lower than the EU average (4.26) while "should be" score is the highest among those countries and much higher than average (4.36). These observations may be interpreted as acceptance of uncertainty by members of Bulgarian society, which experiences fundamental transformation, and a preference for order and discipline to confront chaos and ambiguities in political and economic life that stem from the transformation. In addition, people who have experienced economic burdens and hyperinflation in the 1990s were quite disoriented by politicians' broken promises, and this added to the perceived gaps between reality and societal expectations about the future.

Future Orientation is the degree to which individuals in organizations or society engage in future-oriented behaviors, such as planning, investing in the future, and delaying gratification. It relates to the societal perception of time frames (past, present, future) and meanings of experiences in those frames (Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck 1961). In future-oriented societies, members believe that current actions influence the future, believe in strategy and planning, and look beyond the present into the future. Hofstede emphasized this dimension by changing his earlier Confucian Dynamism (Hofstede and Bond 1988) to Long-Term Orientation (2001), and Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998) applied the Time Horizon dimension to their studies. Per GLOBE research, Future Orientation practices scores positively correlated with countries' economic health (House 2004: 315).

Bulgarian data on Future Orientation also displays contrasting differences between practices ("as is", 2.99) and values ("should be", 5.49) scores and deviations from average scores for the EU countries (3.81 and 5.26). These data reflect the transformation of Bulgarian society from the Communist past associated with long-term future orientation and a central planning system through transitional economy and continuous government reshuffling with a focus on short- and medium-term goals in creating economic and

political infrastructure, and future expectations of the perceived stability and growth within the European Union. Low behavior scores on Future Orientation explain the lack of or ambiguities in strategic vision and suspicion about promised change in the managerial corps and society at large. They present the contrast between the desire of the Bulgarian people to be certain of what the future holds and the political and economic instability that accompanied the socio-economic transition. Inconsistencies in Future Orientation create challenges when working with more future-oriented partners from the EU.

Power Distance is the degree to which members of an organization or society expect and agree that power should be unequally shared; it relates to society's acceptance and endorsement of authority alongside status privileges. Theoretical explanations of different types of power (legitimate, expert, referent) and the need for power and other related attributes (Stogdill 1974; Yukl 2002; McClelland 1985) were supplemented by discussions on the connections of the power factor with government and religion. The relationship between Power Distance and countries' economic health have been assessed as negative for practices and were mixed for values indicators (House 2004: 557).

While the Bulgarian scores on Power Distance display differences between practices and values scores (5.52 vs. 2.60), this gap is quite typical for GLOBE responses evidenced in average scores for the EU countries (5.11 vs. 2.61). Bulgaria's distinction is that its Power Distance practices score is slightly higher than and values score are close to the average scores. These can be interpreted as a prevailing respect for authority and the acceptance of privileges in society combined with a heritage of vertical hierarchies and a centralization of the Communist past. Being historically dominated by great powers for centuries and seeking ways to preserve ethnicity, Bulgarians have developed strong survival skills and conformist behaviors. In recent decades, with higher levels of individual and economic freedoms and a striving for compliance with pan-European values, Bulgarians seek democratic solutions in their politics and daily life and a departure from high Power Distance practices. However, visible generation gaps and still existing challenges in the political landscape make this trend difficult and somewhat uncertain.

Institutional Collectivism is the degree to which organizational and societal norms and practices encourage and reward the collective distribution of resources and collective action, and **Group Collectivism** is the degree to which individuals express pride, loyalty, and cohesiveness in their organizations or families. These phenomena have been widely discussed in the literature (Triandis 1995; Erez/Earely 1993; Hofstede 1980; Kim et al. 1994), with a high level of agreement on the construct, but differences in the scope and the uni- vs. multi-dimensional nature of the individualism-collectivism dyad and mixed results on its impact on countries' economic health.

The Institutional Collectivism practices score for Bulgaria (3.67) is lower than the average score for the EU (4.16); however, the "should be" score (4.65) is close to the average for these countries (4.66). These data may be interpreted as the perception of insufficient institutional support for collective actions at the level of organization or society, and expectations for stronger institutional affiliation in the future. The other explanation for the lower score on Institutional Collectivism is the lack of confidence in the society about the fair redistribution of resources, which could motivate towards stronger collective actions. At the same time, Bulgarian managers displayed a visibly higher Group Collectivism practices score (5.46) compared to the average score for the EU countries

(4.85) with a similar pattern in values scores (6.03 vs. 5.59), hence displaying the broadly perceived value of the group-oriented working environment and pride of and commitment to a family or a team. Overall, Bulgarian scores on collectivism are mixed; however, the profile suggests stronger support for a more collectivist environment and interest in effective collective actions and orientations rather than a trend towards more individualistic behaviors and values. These findings attest to known contradictions of a transitional society which reflect the consequences of the suppression of individual freedom and initiative in the past, individualistic behaviors aligned with networking for survival (often exploited by criminal structures) in the recent decades, as well as appreciation for strong family ties that stem from history and religion.

Humane Orientation is the degree to which individuals in organizations or society encourage and reward individuals for being fair, friendly, generous, caring, and kind to others. This factor was partially considered in cross-cultural literature (Triandis 1995; Schwartz 1992; Hofstede 1980), and was discussed in relation to political systems and social policies. The GLOBE analysis did not find significant relations between Humane Orientation and economic health indicators.

Bulgarian societal culture data displays a gap between “as is” (3.50) and “should be” (5.6) scores, however, with practices scores being slightly lower and values being slightly higher than the average for the EU countries (3.81 and 5.48). Bulgarian managers did not reveal deviations on this dimension; however, the above-mentioned gaps may explain a developing nature of a welfare and legal system, and existing unfairness, corruption, and deviations from ethical norms in political and economic life. While Humane Orientation is usually inversely related to hostilities and aggressiveness in society, modest scores support moderate positioning of the Bulgarian profile on this dimension. Bulgarian values-tied data and the gaps with practices on this dimension reflect a desire for social justice, empathy and compassion for those who are unable to cope with the new environment or have fallen victims to Ponzi schemes, lost properties, savings, or investment in risks, and uncertain economic and social transitions.

Performance Orientation is the extent to which a society encourages or rewards group members for performance involvement and excellence. Cultural indicators of Performance Orientation may include achievement (McClelland 1961; Fyans et al. 1983), personal responsibility, standards of excellence, challenge (Maehr 1974), personal success through competence (Schwartz/Bilsky 1987), as well as hard work and status based on accomplishments (Trompenaars 1993). Per GLOBE research, Performance Orientation practices scores positively correlated with countries’ economic health indicators measured with indexes of economic prosperity, economic productivity, government support for prosperity, societal support for competitiveness, and world competitiveness indexes, however with varying results for values scores (House 2004: 253).

The Bulgarian behaviors score on Performance Orientation (3.62), is lower than the average GLOBE score for the EU countries (3.94), succumbing to the heritage of the Communist era when the system de-emphasized the need to exceed planned benchmarks, and enterprise managers were not rewarded for achievements beyond those targets unless approved by authorities and streamed in propaganda (such as in sports or science). This situation limited the need for and access to additional resources and the flexibility in decision-making to pursue innovation. Achievements were not necessarily supplemented

by appropriate financial stimuli but were occasionally praised symbolically or with political promotions. Bulgaria's recent transition to a market economy was somewhat associated with predatory and non-transparent privatization and the engagement of criminal capital in economic activities; thus, growth was achieved not by exceptional innovations or performance breakthroughs, but through management buyout schemes or barter schemes (often with foreign, typically Russian, business and political involvement). And while clusters of ethical excellence in Bulgarian society cannot be ignored, multiple macroeconomic results were achieved with ethical and moral violations.

Nevertheless, Bulgaria's accession to the European Union puts pressure on enhancing its economic system and competing with other European countries' businesses, hence creating an endorsement of and compliance with higher standards of economic success. The value-tied score displays Performance Orientation (6.31) above the EU average (5.94) and offers an optimistic picture for Bulgaria's vector of economic and social performance.

Gender Egalitarianism is the extent to which an organization or society minimizes gender role differences, and its components include an attitudinal domain with gender stereotypes and gender-role ideology (Beall/Sternberg 1993) and behavioral manifestation with gender discrimination and gender equality (Hendrix 1994). This dimension was partially considered in Hofstede's Masculinity-Femininity dimension (1980). The empirical data on relationship between Gender Egalitarianism and countries' economic health are mixed and typically not significant (House 2004: 368).

In medieval patriarchal Bulgaria, the division of labor by gender was visible with men dominating the labor market. However, in the socialist era, the ideology of gender equality was promoted to bring more women into the economy. Today, women are more involved in household tasks and in education, healthcare or clerical jobs, while still less in senior management and administration, and technical sciences. Women have comparable educational levels with men but lag behind in pay levels. Under Communism, Bulgarian women were engaged in multiple economic activities and family services; however, the latter were ignored in official economic statistics. Nevertheless, Bulgarian data on gender roles in society emphasize the importance of egalitarianism, with its practices score (4.25) visibly higher than the average score for the EU countries (3.56), and with its values score (4.71) slightly lower than the average score for the EU countries (4.80). The data on the perception of gender roles in Bulgaria displays one of the most important distinctions of the country's societal culture profile. It confirms the advancements in the equality of the roles of women and men and displays Bulgaria among the leading EU countries in terms of perception of egalitarian practices. At the same time, values-tied data position Bulgaria slightly lower than the EU countries' average, hence offering predictions about the potential decline of egalitarian orientations in the future. Nevertheless, the data attest to the idea that Bulgaria remains an egalitarian society and may serve as a role model for the other countries promoting gender egalitarian standards in the European Union. And considering the growing role of women in the labor force in the near future, the knowledge of trends and perceptions in this area may help Bulgarian organizations capitalize on the roles women play as economic actors, creating a unique competitive advantage.

Assertiveness is the degree to which individuals in organizations or society are assertive, confrontational, and aggressive in social relationships. Though an important

aspect of societal culture, this dimension has received relatively less attention in literature. It was conceptualized on a continuum between assertive and non-assertive behaviors (Rakos 1991) and Hofstede partially considered it in the masculinity-femininity dimension (1980). While Triandis (1995) suggested that economic health is positively connected to masculinity indexes, GLOBE research did not find significant correlations between Assertiveness and economic macro indicators (House 2004: 417).

The Bulgarian score on Assertiveness was lower than the average EU countries' score on practices (3.67 vs. 4.18) but higher on values (4.40 vs. 3.61). Assertiveness behavior-tied scores deviate from the average, thus explaining avoidance on confrontational, aggressive behaviors in an environment known for collective actions with obedient behaviors and a conformist mentality. The lower level of assertiveness in society may also be interpreted as a result of strong family bonds, nepotism, and friendliness and kindness, which are deeply rooted in Orthodox traditions. Additionally, higher values-tied scores may predict a move towards a more assertive social environment in the future.

Positioning Bulgarian Societal Culture in the European Union's Cross-Cultural Space

To position Bulgarian management in the cross-cultural space of the European Union, the author follows the mainstream Kogut-Singh index methodology (1986), which permits composite assessments of cross-country cultural distance measures. The cultural distance index is computed as corrected by variance averaged squared distances on cultural dimensions and takes the following form (1):

$$A_{iB} = \frac{\sum_{k=1}^9 (I_{kB} - I_{ki})^2}{V_k} / 9 \quad (1)$$

A_{iB} - cultural distance between country i and Bulgaria;

I_{kB} - score for Bulgaria on GLOBE's k -th dimension ($k = 1, \dots, 9$);

I_{ki} - score for i -th EU country on GLOBE's k -th dimension ($k = 1, \dots, 9$; $i = 1, \dots, 21$);

V_k - variance of the k -th index.

The computation of cultural distance indexes for pairs of all countries included in this research resulted in the creation of a cultural distance matrix. This matrix was further transformed into "cultural friction" map with a multidimensional scaling procedure applied to a square symmetric 21x21 matrix with expectations that mapping the cross-cultural landscape provided a perceptual map that showed how different or similar country profiles were and whether they clustered or not. This model did not require linearity or multivariate normality and was found more attractive than factor analysis. It resulted in a coordinate matrix (output) whose configuration minimized a loss function (strain) and reliability was tested with a squared correlation of the input distances with scaled p-shaped distances using MDS coordinates. R-squared as the fit measure for behaviors was 0.91 and

for values was 0.99—both higher than the required 0.80 for good metric scaling. Figure 4 displays the multidimensional scaling maps for the EU countries both on practices data and on values data.

Important observations stem from these “cultural friction” maps. Firstly, Bulgaria’s behavior-tied positioning is relatively marginal, and is not visibly clustered with the other countries. This explains the greater cross-cultural barriers in cross-border interactions with other European partners and the negative impact of poor cross-cultural competencies on productive collaboration. Secondly, Bulgaria’s values-tied positioning displays more consistency with the mainstream values orientation of the EU countries, hence offering optimistic arguments towards expected cross-cultural efforts and future successful collaboration. Third, the combination of the two “cultural friction” maps suggests that the vector of development of Bulgarian societal culture in the context of the European Union is aimed towards greater integration into the mainstream cultural core rather than exclusion from it.

The distance scores were further sorted in ascending order in order to distinguish between countries that are culturally closer to Bulgaria (on a composite Kogut-Singh index) and those that reveal greater cultural distance. Figure 5 displays distance scores for practices-tied and values-tied Bulgaria’s societal culture relative to the EU countries.

In terms of distance proximity measured with practices and values scores, Bulgaria may be associated with distinctive cultural clusters (Ronen and Shenkar 1985; House et al. 2004: 178-218).

On a *practices* perceptual map, Bulgaria was positioned on the periphery of cross-cultural space. Among the six countries closest to Bulgaria on cultural distance, Slovenia, Poland, Hungary and Greece represented the Eastern European cluster, and Portugal and Italy represented the Latin European cluster. Amongst the six countries most distant from Bulgaria were Denmark and Sweden representing the Nordic cluster, the Netherlands and Austria representing the Germanic cluster, and Albania and Ireland representing other clusters. Bulgaria’s proximity to the East European cluster can be explained by a shared recent history of Communist rule and the transition that followed, as well as close linguistic (Poland and Slovenia) and religious (Greece) ties. The findings attest to Bulgaria’s compatibility with this cluster’s general features such as high Power Distance, Institutional and Group Collectivism, and at the same time display attachment to the cultural heritage of family and group cohesion (Bakacsi et al. 2002). The findings are also consistent with comparisons of East Central Europe (including Bulgaria) on culture-determined time behaviors, emphasizing risk aversion, harmony seeking and face saving (Fink and Meierewert 2004).

On a *values* perceptual map among the six countries with the lowest values-tied cultural distance from Bulgaria, three countries—Albania, Slovenia and Poland—represented the East European cluster, and Spain, Italy, and Portugal represented the Latin European cluster. Amongst the six countries with the greatest values-tied distance from Bulgaria were Germany, the Netherlands and Austria representing the Germanic cluster, Greece and Hungary representing the East European cluster, along with Turkey from the Middle Eastern cluster. These data support the assumption of Bulgaria’s cultural greater compatibility with societies of Latin European and Eastern European clusters and differences from countries from other cultural clusters.

Overall, the data on Bulgaria's cultural compatibility with Latin European and Eastern European clusters not only support the assumptions about historic roots and ties in the region but also attest to greater cross-border opportunities in collaborating with those countries.

Conclusions

The empirical study of Bulgaria's societal culture based on the survey of a management population created a distinctive profile along behavior and anthropological traditions of social scholarly literature. It revealed distinctions of behavior-tied and values-tied attributes of Bulgaria that stem from history, religion, and language, as well as from societal, political, and economic developments. Placed in the broader context of multi-country comparative and cross-cultural research, this study positioned Bulgaria in the European Union's cross-cultural space.

The Bulgarian *behavior-tied* cultural profile is relatively high on Collectivism, Power Distance, and Gender Egalitarianism, and relatively low on Performance and Future Orientation, with extremely low scores on Uncertainty Avoidance. Low Performance Orientation stems from the previous centrally planned system with a low individual initiative and limited achievement-oriented deviations from plans. While lower Uncertainty Avoidance scores may respond to a search for entrepreneurship and innovation, low Future Orientation limits those initiatives to short-term moves rather than long-term endeavors, with a focus on survival in a turbulent economic environment. Lower scores in Humane Orientation and Future Orientation may explain a lack of attention to the effective development of people in organizations, and high Power Distance scores support the existing bureaucracy and the search for tough moves in restructuring businesses and industries.

The Bulgarian *values-tied* cultural profile provides a promising picture with an emphasis on future-oriented strategic development, and a search for a humanistic and democratic-value system. The scores on Performance Orientation and Future Orientation display expectations of effective market-driven achievements aligned with a commitment to long-term growth vision, and higher scores on Uncertainty Orientation support a search for a more disciplined socio-economic landscape. Scores on Collectivism lean towards stronger collective actions rather than a drift towards individualism.

These findings attest to Bulgaria's transition towards free-market behaviors with an emphasis on performance and innovation, a striving for stability, discipline, reliance on collective actions, and the search for values-tied compatibility with other countries. It is also clear that this profile cannot be understood without a deep knowledge of the history and culture of Bulgarian society.

The configuration of Bulgaria's cultural profile shapes organizational practices, the perception of effective leadership, and serves in some cases as a contributor to or, in other cases as impediment to, effective cross-border business activities. The study revealed two important patterns for Bulgaria's societal culture when elevating the research to the level of European Union countries. Firstly, it distinguished between EU countries on a composite "cultural friction" scale that are closer to Bulgaria from countries that are more distant. The closeness may contribute to productive relations and effective cross-border collaboration,

while the distance may force parties to seek additional competencies, resources, and tools to manage cross-cultural conflicts. Second, the study highlighted similarities and differences on a dimension-by-dimension basis, offering more details for the cross-cultural analysis of Bulgaria in the EU cross-cultural space. Overall, the analysis confirmed Bulgaria's cultural proximity to countries of East European and Latin European clusters in practices and substantial behavior-tied distance from countries of the Germanic, Nordic, and Middle Eastern clusters. It also supported Bulgaria's values-tied compatibility with the Latin Europe and Eastern European clusters.

This research has both theoretical value and practical implications. It applied the cross-cultural research pattern to Bulgaria, a country that has long been on a periphery of scholarly attention, and addressed culture analysis in the broader context of multiple countries of the European Union. These data can be further applied to complex economic models that explore culture's effects in international trade or foreign direct investment. Hence, the study contributed to a deeper understanding of a country's societal culture and, in broader terms, added to the existing scholarly literature on Bulgaria, adding a cross-discipline comparative perspective for future research.

This research may assist policymakers in preparing and making decisions that consider cultural factors in cross-border relations in the EU. Cultural distance may serve as a predictor for more or less efficient interactions and in the latter case, justify the need for additional competencies and resources to overcome "cultural frictions" in dealing with EU partners.

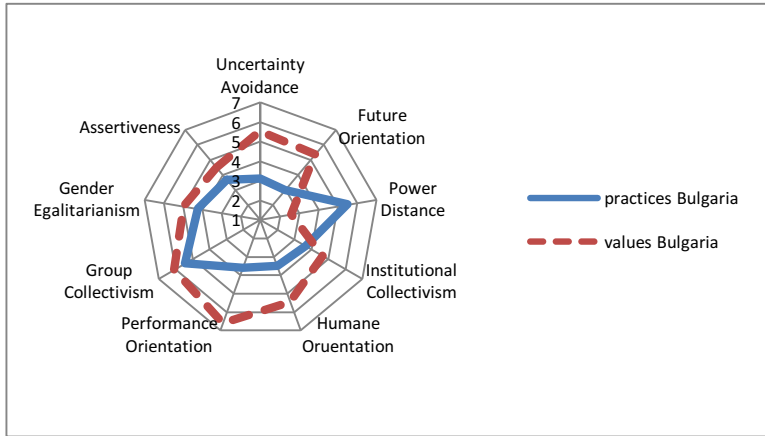
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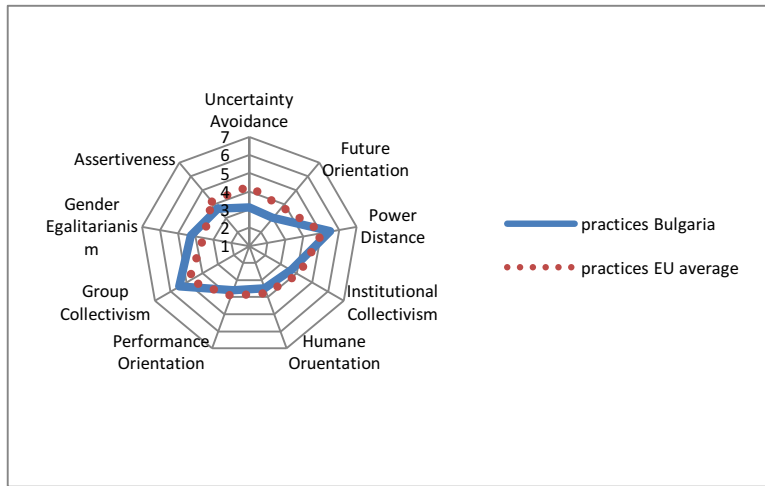
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(a) Bulgaria's cultural profile (practices and values)



(b) Bulgaria's practices scores compared to the EU average



(c) Bulgaria's values scores compared to the EU average

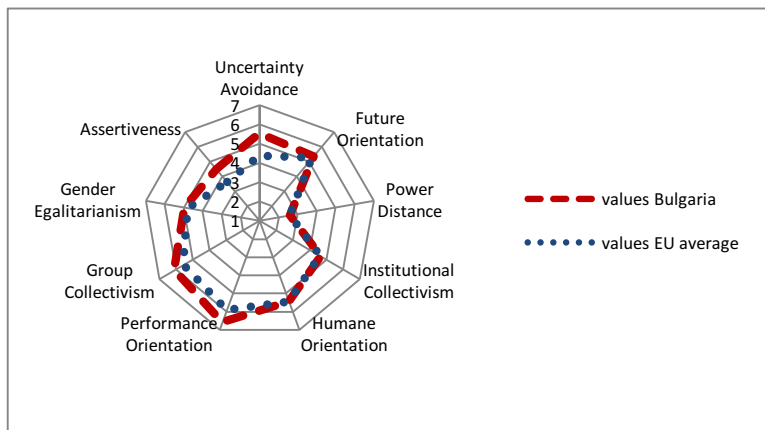


Figure 1. Bulgaria's societal culture profile and comparisons to the EU average scores

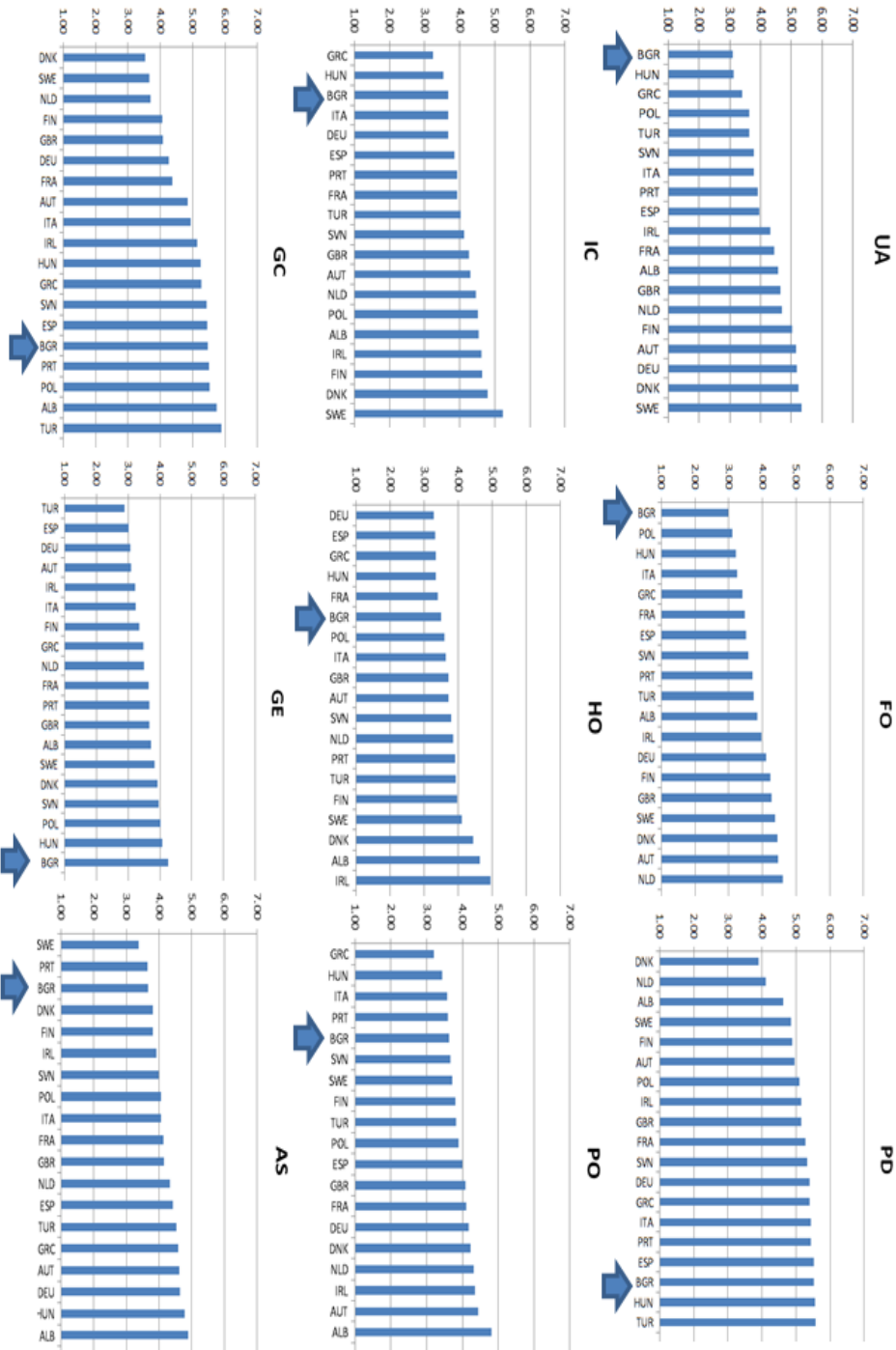


Figure 2. Behavior-tied (“as is”) societal culture scores for Bulgaria relative to the EU countries

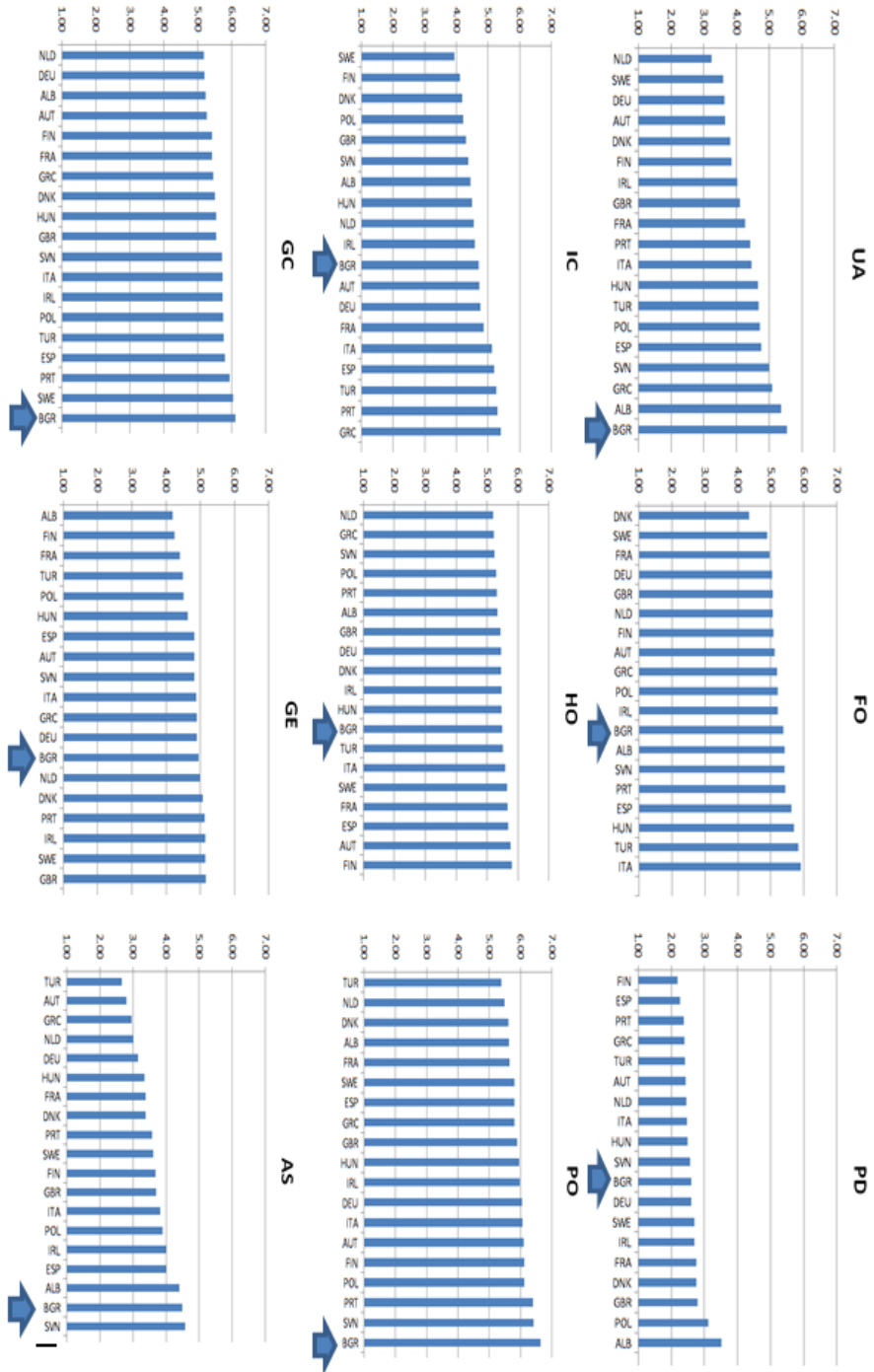
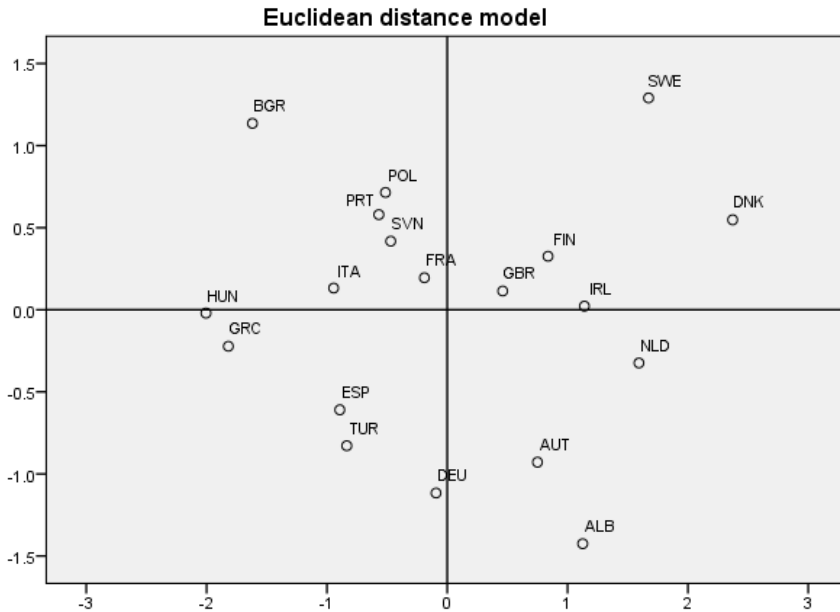
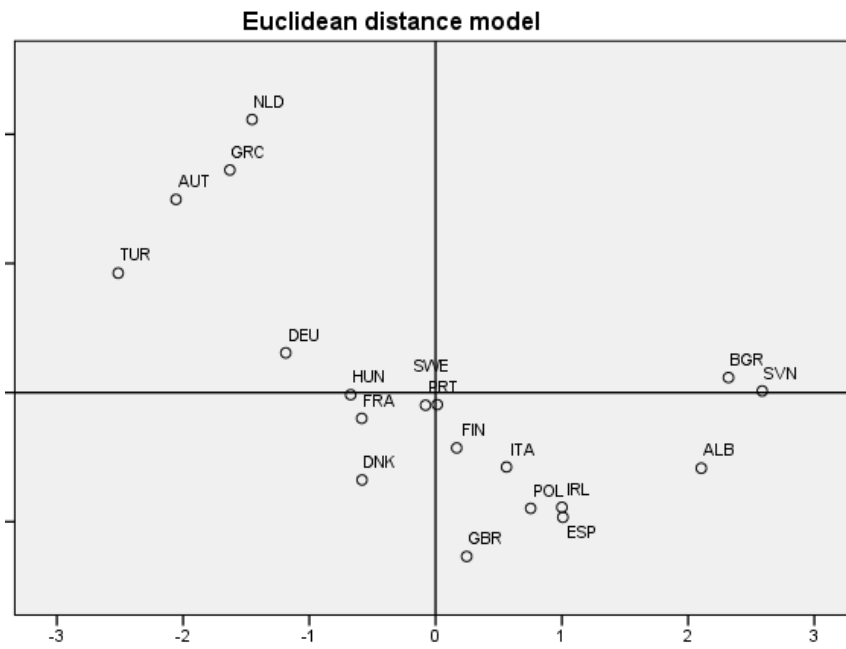


Figure 3. Values-tied (“should be”) societal culture scores for Bulgaria relative to the EU countries



(a) Practices



(b) Values

Figure 4. “Cultural friction” maps for the EU countries (multidimensional scaling of cultural distance matrixes)

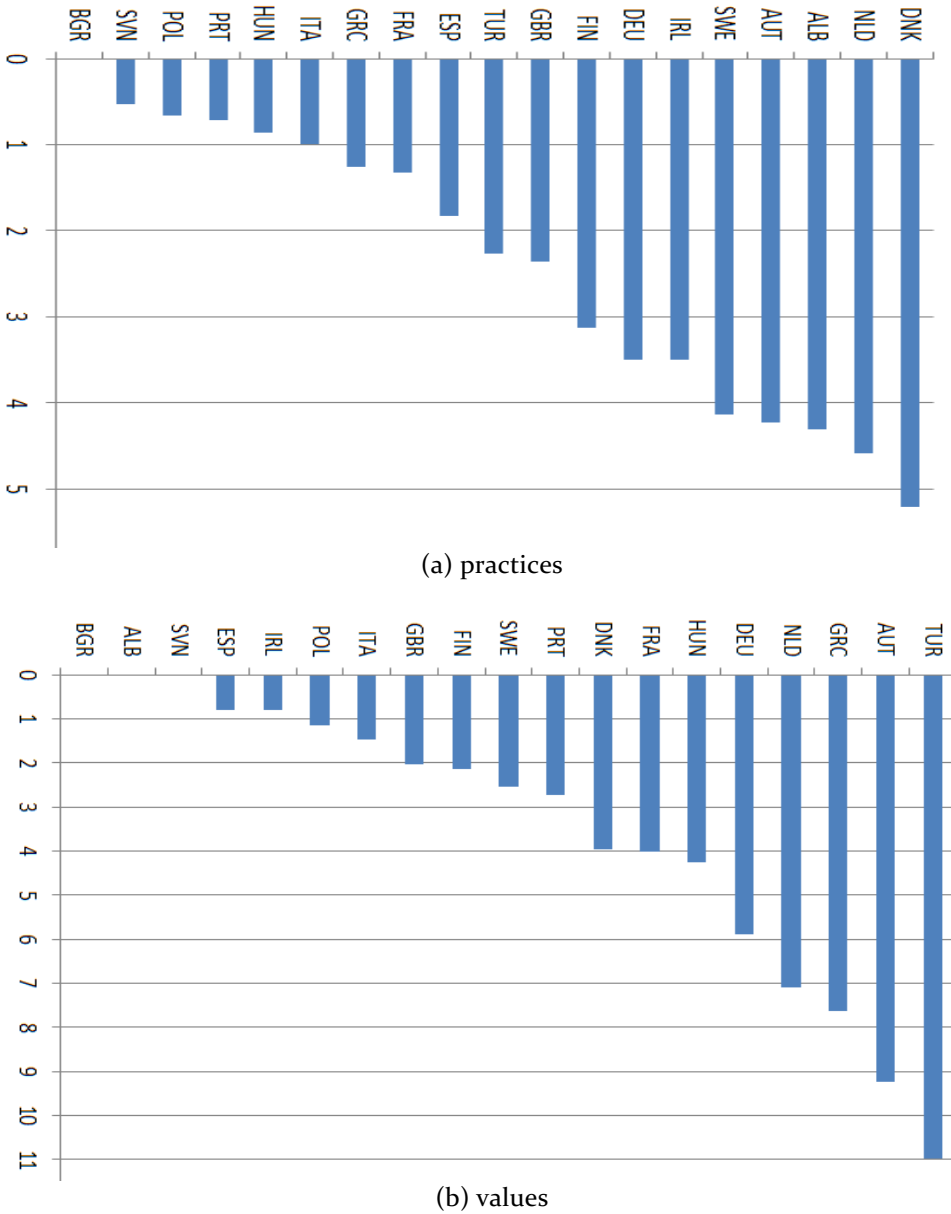


Figure 5. “Cultural friction” (composite cultural distance on practices-tied and values-tied data) between Bulgaria and the EU countries.

Appendix 1. List of the European Union countries (members and candidates) that participated in the GLOBE cross-cultural research (with ISO codes)

Albania (ALB)	Finland (FIN)	Netherlands (NLD)
Austria (AUT)	France (FRA)	Poland (POL)
Bulgaria (BGR)*	United Kingdom (GBR)	Portugal (PRT)
Germany (DEU)	Greece (GRC)	Slovenia (SVN)
Denmark (DNK)	Hungary (HUN)	Sweden (SWE)
Spain (ESP)	Ireland (IRL)	Turkey (TUR)
	Italy (ITA)	

Source: (House et al. 2004; * - Bobina and Sabotinova 2017)