

THE DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF BULGARIA'S IMAGE IN MARGARET THATCHER'S PUBLIC STATEMENTS

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Abstract. This paper examines how Margaret Thatcher's public discourse between 1981 and 1991 constructs Bulgaria's image within the shifting geopolitical landscape of late Cold War and post-communist Europe. Drawing on Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), complemented by the approaches of Wodak, van Dijk, and Chilton and Schäffner, the study investigates lexical, syntactic, and ideological patterns across Thatcher's speeches, press conferences, and parliamentary statements. The analysis reveals a consistent discursive hierarchy in which Poland and Hungary are individualized as exemplary reformers, while Bulgaria is positioned as a conditional and derivative actor on the international arena. Through recurrent formulations, Thatcher links democratization to neoliberal reform, embedding Western political and economic values within the language of transition. Modal structures encode distance and conditionality, situating Britain and the European Community as arbiters of legitimacy. The findings expose how Thatcher's discourse performs ideological work beyond description: it reaffirms Western dominance by defining the criteria of democratic belonging. Bulgaria's identity emerges as that of a **deferred European** – acknowledged as part of the tide of liberty, yet linguistically and symbolically relegated to Europe's periphery. The study concludes that Thatcher's rhetoric shows how post-1989 political discourse simultaneously celebrated freedom and reproduced hierarchies, shaping not only perceptions of Eastern Europe but also the language of European integration itself.

Keywords: Margaret Thatcher; Bulgaria; Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA); European Identity; Western Hegemony

JEL: P20, Z13, Z18

Introduction

During her premiership (1979 – 1990), Margaret Thatcher developed a distinctive governing ethos that shaped both her domestic and international agenda. Across several accounts, Margaret Thatcher's governance and foreign policy are described as interconnected expressions of conviction, moral certainty, and neoliberal

pragmatism. In *The Autobiography*, Thatcher (2013) presents leadership as an exercise in personal will and moral clarity, guided by faith, duty, and self-discipline; her decisive, often confrontational style is depicted as both ethically necessary and politically courageous, driven by the belief that only conviction – not compromise – could “rescue Britain” from decline. Seldon and Collings (2013) interpret this as an authoritarian yet transformative mode of governance, characterized by centralized power, ideological coherence, and a fusion of economic liberalism with social conservatism, designed to restore national self-belief through market discipline and individual responsibility. Cannadine (2017), offering a more historical and reflective lens, frames Thatcher’s leadership as moralistic, adversarial, and rhetorically charged, rooted in her Methodist upbringing and belief in self-help, and argues that she fused moral conviction with market rationality to moralize economics and recast national identity around enterprise and autonomy. These same principles extended into her foreign policy: Thatcher (2013) portrays her global stance as one of principled strength and sovereignty, exemplified by the Falklands War and her alliance with Ronald Reagan; Seldon and Collings (2013) emphasize her assertive Atlanticism, moral leadership, and growing Euroscepticism; and Cannadine (2017) situates her diplomacy within Cold War moralism and nationalist modernisation. Collectively, the three works present a consistent image of Thatcher as a leader who projected her domestic ethos of conviction politics onto the international stage, crafting a moralized narrative of strength, freedom, and national renewal that was both visionary and divisive (Thatcher 2013; Seldon and Collings 2013; Cannadine 2017).

Margaret Thatcher’s discourse on Eastern Europe reveals not only her Cold War convictions but also her evolving recognition of the region’s political transformation. Among the countries she addressed, Bulgaria occupies a revealing yet often overlooked position. Frequently described as one of Moscow’s most loyal satellites, Bulgaria emerges in Thatcher’s speeches and press conferences as both a symbol of communist orthodoxy and, later, as a hesitant participant in the democratic tide of 1989 – 1990. Her references to Bulgaria are scattered, brief, and often embedded within broader discussions of the Soviet bloc or Balkan geopolitics. Yet, taken together, they trace a discursive trajectory – from Bulgaria as a subordinate appendage of Soviet power to a case of conditional Western engagement, and finally to an uncertain yet potentially partner in post-communist Europe.

The central research question guiding this study is: *How does Margaret Thatcher’s public discourse between 1981 and 1991 construct Bulgaria’s image within the ideological and geopolitical hierarchies of Cold War and post-communist Europe?*

The primary aim of the study is to uncover how Thatcher’s language represents Bulgaria’s political transformation and European identity through the analytical lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Identify and interpret the linguistic and rhetorical patterns through which Thatcher characterizes Bulgaria in relation to other Eastern European states.
2. Examine how these representations reflect and reproduce broader ideological and geopolitical hierarchies.
3. Explore how Thatcher's discourse participates in the Western redefinition of "Europe" after the end of the Cold War.

The research tasks pertain to the performance of textual, discursive practice and social practice analyses in accordance with Fairclough's (1992, 1995) three-dimensional CDA model, which will be explored in greater detail in the next section of the paper on the research methodology.

By integrating these analytical levels, the study aims to reveal how Thatcher's discourse constructed Bulgaria as a conditional European actor – acknowledged as part of the tide of liberty, yet linguistically positioned on the periphery of democratic legitimacy. The analysis thus contributes to understanding how political discourse both mirrors and shapes international hierarchies, demonstrating that Thatcher's rhetoric was instrumental in narrating, evaluating, and hierarchizing the post-1989 European order.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to understanding how Western political discourse constructed Eastern Europe's identity during a decisive moment of historical transformation. While Thatcher's rhetoric on major powers such as the Soviet Union, Poland, and Hungary has been widely examined, her references to Bulgaria have received little scholarly attention. By applying Fairclough's (1992, 1995) model of Critical Discourse Analysis, this research offers a systematic account of how linguistic and ideological choices produced hierarchies within the imagined European community. It reveals that Thatcher's discourse not only reflected Britain's foreign policy but also participated in the symbolic redefinition of Europe after 1989, positioning Bulgaria as a deferred democracy – acknowledged yet conditionally accepted. The study, therefore, contributes to broader debates in discourse studies, European identity, and post-communist political communication by showing how language both represents and performs geopolitical power.

Methodology

This study applies Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to Margaret Thatcher's public references to Bulgaria between 1981 and 1991. The analysis follows Fairclough's three-dimensional model of discourse, which views texts simultaneously as linguistic artefacts, as discursive practices of production and reception, and as social practices embedded in broader structures of power (Fairclough 1989, 1992, 1995). This framework enables a multi-layered investigation of Thatcher's speeches, press conferences, and parliamentary statements, focusing both on micro-linguistic features (word choice, modality, metaphor) and on how these texts reproduce larger ideological formations of the Cold War and post-communist transitions.

In addition to Fairclough, the study draws on Ruth Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) (Wodak 2009; Wodak & Meyer 2001), which emphasises situating discourse within its historical and political context. This is particularly relevant in the case of Thatcher's comments on Bulgaria, which were often prompted by specific events such as the fall of Todor Zhivkov in 1989, Bulgaria's first democratic elections in 1990, and European Community debates about extending aid. Contextualization makes visible how Thatcher's language both reflected and shaped Western perceptions of Bulgaria's trajectory.

The analysis also encompasses Teun A. van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to CDA, which emphasizes the role of elite discourse in reproducing ideology and legitimizing power (van Dijk 2008a, 2008b). Thatcher, as a Western leader, occupied a privileged position in defining the meaning of "democracy", "reform", and "Europe", thereby constructing hierarchies among Eastern European states.

To address the specific features of political discourse, the study incorporates insights from Paul Chilton and Christina Schäffner (2004), who highlight the rhetorical and strategic dimensions of political language, including metaphor, legitimization, and audience orientation. Thatcher's use of recurrent formulae such as "plural parties and market economy" or "rule of law and human rights" can thus be analyzed as both persuasive strategies and ideological markers.

Finally, the study benefits from V.K. Bhatia's (2017) critical genre analysis, which draws attention to the institutional settings of political communication. Thatcher's discourse on Bulgaria took shape in different genres – parliamentary debates, summit press conferences, bilateral interviews – each with distinct constraints and audiences. Attention to genre helps explain why Thatcher's discourse on Bulgaria was often generic (subsumed under "Eastern Europe") in multilateral contexts but more pointed when directly questioned by Bulgarian journalists.

By integrating these approaches, the analysis foregrounds the discursive construction of Bulgaria in Thatcher's language: how it was named, categorized, and evaluated; how it was positioned relative to other Eastern European states; and how these representations reflected and reproduced wider social practices of Cold War and post-Cold War geopolitics.

Analytical Procedure

The present study operationalizes the CDA framework through a three-stage process corresponding to Fairclough's (1992, 1995) three-dimensional model, enriched with analytical procedures drawn from Wodak (2009), van Dijk (2008), and Chilton and Schäffner (2004). This integrated approach enables the systematic examination of Thatcher's discourse on Bulgaria at the textual, discursive, and social levels.

At the **textual level** (micro analysis), attention is paid to the linguistic form and structure of Thatcher's statements. This involves identifying recurrent lexical

choices and collocations associated with *Bulgaria* and examining the evaluative adjectives that frame the country in either positive or negative terms. The analysis of modality focuses on the use of modal verbs and hedges, which reveal degrees of obligation, uncertainty, and authority in Thatcher's stance. Furthermore, particular attention is devoted to metaphors and formulaic constructions which embed Bulgaria within broader ideological narratives of democratization and transition. The study also examines syntactic structures, observing how Bulgaria is positioned within lists – often following Poland and Hungary – and whether it is treated as an individual actor or subsumed into the collective category of “all states in Eastern Europe”.

The **discursive practice level** (meso analysis) focuses on the processes of text production, distribution, and consumption. Drawing on Bhatia's (2017) genre analysis, the study differentiates how Bulgaria is represented across various communicative contexts – parliamentary debates, press conferences, European Council statements, and bilateral interviews. Each genre imposes different institutional constraints and communicative purposes that shape Thatcher's discourse. The concept of audience orientation, derived from Chilton and Schäffner (2004), is also applied to examine how Thatcher adjusted her rhetoric when addressing Bulgarian journalists directly, compared to when she spoke before domestic audiences or European counterparts. Moreover, the study also maps how Thatcher's references to Bulgaria intersect with broader Cold War and post-Cold War discourses of “democracy versus communism”, European Community enlargement, and Balkan geopolitics.

Finally, at the **social practice level** (macro analysis), Thatcher's discourse is interpreted within its historical and ideological contexts. This involves examining how Bulgaria is first constructed as a Soviet satellite, later as a conditionally democratising state, and finally as a regional actor in the early post-communist Balkans. Drawing on van Dijk's (2008) emphasis on power and ideology, the analysis explores how Thatcher's position as Prime Minister enabled her to define the terms of political legitimacy and recognition for Eastern European countries, thus reproducing Western hierarchies of power within Europe. The study also examines emerging discursive hierarchies, showing how Bulgaria is consistently ranked below Poland and Hungary, portrayed as a slower and less decisive reformer.

Because CDA is not purely descriptive but inherently critical, the study also incorporates a reflexive dimension. Following Wodak and Meyer (2001), the analysis acknowledges that the researcher's interpretive position shapes the reading of texts. Rather than aiming for complete neutrality, the objective is to maintain awareness of how discourse simultaneously reflects and constructs power relations. In this sense, the examination of Thatcher's discourse on Bulgaria seeks not only to describe linguistic patterns but also to uncover the ideological and geopolitical assumptions that underpin them.

Dataset

Thatcher's primary discourse on Bulgaria comes from House of Commons debates (1984 – 1989), international press conferences (1981, 1985, 1990), summit statements (1990), and direct questions and answers with Bulgarian journalists during 1989 – 1990. Later references tie Bulgaria to Balkan geopolitics in the post-communist context.

The corpus for this study was drawn from two major electronic repositories of primary material: the Margaret Thatcher Foundation Digital Archive (<https://www.margaretthatcher.org/>) and the UK Parliamentary Hansard Online Archive (<https://hansard.parliament.uk/>). Together, these collections provide comprehensive access to Thatcher's public speeches, press conferences, interviews, and parliamentary statements between 1979 and 1991.

The search process was conducted systematically using the digital search engines of both archives. In the Thatcher Foundation database, the keyword "Bulgaria" was combined with related terms such as "Bulgarian," "Eastern Europe," and "Balkan(s)" to identify all relevant references. The results were then filtered chronologically (1981 – 1991) and manually reviewed to ensure contextual relevance – that the reference to Bulgaria was substantive rather than incidental. In the Hansard database, searches were performed using "Bulgaria" and "Bulgarian" within the same time frame, focusing on Thatcher's own contributions recorded in the House of Commons debates.

Together, these electronic archives provide a complete and verifiable textual base for analyzing how Thatcher constructed Bulgaria's image through her public rhetoric. The digital format ensured consistency, accuracy, and accessibility of the material, while the manual contextual review guaranteed that each selected reference reflected a meaningful instance of discourse relevant to the study's research question.

Hence Margaret Thatcher's references to Bulgaria appear in a small but significant number of statements, which, though limited, expose how the former UK prime minister constructed Bulgaria's place within the shifting political geography of Eastern Europe at the end of the Cold War.

Her earliest mention occurred at a press conference in Kuwait (28 September 1981), where Bulgaria was briefly mentioned in discussion of Britain's relations with the Balkans and the Eastern bloc (Thatcher 1981). The comment was descriptive and diplomatic, presenting Bulgaria as part of the Soviet sphere.

During the late 1980s, as Eastern Europe's revolutions unfolded, references became more explicit. In her *House of Commons* statement on the Strasbourg European Council (12 December 1989), Thatcher listed Bulgaria among Poland, Hungary, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Romania while celebrating the "tide of liberty" sweeping the region (Hansard 1989b). Yet Bulgaria remained unelaborated – an indistinct participant in a collective narrative of change.

At the *Strasbourg European Council press conference* (9 December 1989), she stated there could be “no specific policy on Bulgaria”, since Britain’s approach applied to “all states in Eastern Europe” that must develop “plural political parties” and pursue “economic reform” (Thatcher 1989a). Her remark that Bulgaria’s “course of action has been rather different from the others” signaled a perceived lag behind Poland and Hungary.

The pattern continued at the *Dublin European Council press conference* (28 April 1990), where she “hoped that Bulgaria would become fully democratic... with a rule of law based on human rights and a market economy” (Thatcher 1990a). The repeated modal verb *hope* underscored Western conditionality – Bulgaria’s eligibility for aid hinged on meeting liberal democratic and economic benchmarks.

A similar perception surfaced in Thatcher’s *meeting with François Mitterrand* (20 January 1990), when he noted that “that left only Romania and Bulgaria for the rest of us” (Thatcher 1990c), reflecting a shared Western view of Bulgaria as a slower reformer. Additional references appear in her *statement on Romania* (22 December 1989) and *European Council conclusions on Eastern Europe* (1990), which extended aid programs “first to Poland and Hungary and later” to others, including Bulgaria (Thatcher 1990b).

In later speeches (1990 – 1991), Thatcher mentioned Bulgaria in the context of Balkan stability and Yugoslavia’s conflicts (Thatcher 1990 – 1991a; 1990 – 1991b), thereby shifting its image from a hesitant reformer to a regional actor. Overall, these primary sources trace a clear pattern: Bulgaria is acknowledged but rarely individualized - portrayed as a peripheral and conditional democratizer, consistently evaluated against the benchmark of Poland and Hungary.

Interpreting Thatcher’s Construction of Bulgaria’s Image

Following the methodological framework outlined above, this section applies Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to Margaret Thatcher’s public statements, parliamentary speeches, and press conferences in which she refers to Bulgaria between 1981 and 1991. Using Fairclough’s (1992, 1995) three-dimensional model – enriched by the discourse-historical and socio-cognitive insights of Wodak (2009), van Dijk (2008), and Chilton and Schäffner (2004) – the analysis explores how Thatcher’s language constructs Bulgaria’s image within the ideological and geopolitical landscape of late Cold War and post-communist Europe.

Thatcher’s discourse consistently situates Bulgaria in a comparative framework dominated by Poland and Hungary. These two states are repeatedly singled out as pace-setters – often named first and paired as exemplars – while Bulgaria is typically mentioned mid-sequence or folded into the collective label of “Eastern Europe”. When Thatcher hails a “tide of liberty”, she enumerates “Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, East Germany, Czechoslovakia”, but the momentum of democratization is implicitly attached to Poland and Hungary; Bulgaria is present yet not thematized

(Hansard 1989b). Similarly, in her reflective Commons statement on the upheavals of 1989, she identifies “the most important thing” as democracy “in the Soviet Union, Poland, Hungary, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, [and] Bulgaria”, again foregrounding the core pair before reaching Bulgaria (Hansard 1989b).

This discursive pattern of visibility without individualization establishes a hierarchy of democratic progress. Thatcher’s lexical and syntactic choices consistently encode differentiation: Bulgaria is acknowledged as part of Europe’s transformation but described as “different” or “uncertain”. In her Strasbourg press conference (9 December 1989), responding to a Bulgarian journalist, she remarked:

“There cannot be a specific policy on Bulgaria. Our general policy to all states in Eastern Europe is that we seek reform, to be a full democratic state in the full meaning of that term... So far, Bulgaria, as you know, has had some changes, but the course of action has been rather different from the others, but we do not know what will happen”.

Her choice of words – “reform”, “full democratic state”, “plural political parties”, and “economic reform” – signals that democracy is defined in Western liberal terms, a normative model Bulgaria has yet to achieve. The repetition of “full” emphasizes completeness and sets a Western benchmark. Phrases such as “rather different from the others” perform a subtle but powerful act of categorisation, positioning Bulgaria as less advanced than Poland and Hungary. The modal “cannot” in “There cannot be a specific policy on Bulgaria” erases individuality, folding Bulgaria into the undifferentiated collective of “all states in Eastern Europe”.

Thatcher’s later remarks in Dublin (28 April 1990) reproduce the same conditional logic:

“We hope that Bulgaria will become fully democratic; we hope that she will go further to have a rule of law based on human rights and that she will have a market economy... then obviously we, too, will be prepared to help”.

The repetition of “we hope” conveys cautious optimism but also institutional distance. The clause “we... will be prepared to help” introduces conditional reciprocity: assistance is contingent on Bulgaria’s conformity with liberal-democratic norms. The syntax enacts hierarchy: the West evaluates and rewards; Bulgaria aspires and complies. The triadic formula “rule of law, human rights, market economy” functions as an ideological checklist linking democracy with neoliberal economics, a linguistic manifestation of Thatcher’s broader political worldview.

Even when Thatcher includes Bulgaria in the collective “tide of liberty” (Statement on Romania, 22 December 1989), her syntax and sequencing maintain hierarchy:

“We have seen in recent months a tide of liberty and democracy flowing through Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, East Germany, and Czechoslovakia”.

The metaphor of a *tide* naturalizes political change as a historical inevitability, yet the order of enumeration – Poland and Hungary first – marks the leaders of the transformation. Bulgaria participates but remains discursively midstream, its individuality subsumed by the wave.

The discursive context of these statements further clarifies their function. In press conferences, Thatcher's speech adheres to diplomatic genre conventions: cautious, general, and institutionally constrained. Her exchanges with Bulgarian journalists at Strasbourg and Dublin are polite and noncommittal, reflecting a strategic effort to balance engagement with restraint. The repeated use of "we" – as in "*we seek reform*" or "*we hope that Bulgaria will become fully democratic*" – situates Thatcher as a representative of collective Western consensus rather than a bilateral partner.

In parliamentary debates, however, her tone is firmer and evaluative. In her *statement to the House of Commons on the European Council in Strasbourg* (12 December 1989), she declared that "*the most important thing is democracy in the Soviet Union, Poland, Hungary, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, [and] Bulgaria*" (Hansard 1989b). The formulaic listing again marks Bulgaria as part of a bloc rather than as an individual political actor. Through Bhatia's (2017) notion of genre embedding, Thatcher's remarks fulfil institutional purposes: legitimizing policy before Parliament while performing Western consensus in press settings. The audience orientation (Chilton and Schäffner 2004) is evident in her modulation of tone – from prescriptive at home to cautious abroad – underscoring her dual identity as domestic leader and European stateswoman.

These discursive practices are intertextually linked to broader European Community rhetoric on reform and aid. Thatcher's phrasing parallels EC policy language from the PHARE and G-24 programmes, which initially targeted Poland and Hungary and were later "*extended*" to include Bulgaria. Her repetition of that sequencing mirrors the institutional structure of Western engagement and reinforces Bulgaria's position as a "second-wave" reformer.

At the social level, Thatcher's discourse reflects the ideological logic of post-Cold War Europe, in which Western liberal democracy serves as both a moral ideal and a geopolitical threshold. Her descriptions of Bulgaria as "different", "not yet", or "still becoming" reproduce a teleological view of transition – a linear journey from communism to Western modernity. Drawing on van Dijk's (2008) framework, Thatcher's language exemplifies how elite discourse defines the boundaries of legitimacy, shaping public understanding of who qualifies as "European". Terms such as "*full democratic state*" and "*rule of law*" universalize Western values, while their conditional framing ("*if Bulgaria will go the further way... then we will help*") sustains asymmetrical power relations.

The cumulative effect is a discursive hierarchy of reform. Poland and Hungary are consistently portrayed as leaders – "already" democratic or exemplary – while

Bulgaria is represented as uncertain, slower, and derivative. Even when Thatcher's tone is supportive, her syntax and modality signal evaluation from a distance. Through such language, the West – and Thatcher personally – becomes the arbiter of post-communist success.

In sum, Thatcher's discourse constructs Bulgaria as an ambivalent European subject: part of the "tide of liberty", yet only conditionally admitted to the category of full democracy. Following Wodak and Meyer (2001), this analysis recognizes that such discourse not only describes political reality but actively constructs it. By framing Bulgaria through comparative hierarchies, Thatcher's language participates in the symbolic reordering of post-1989 Europe, defining who belonged at its centre and who remained on its periphery.

The critical discourse analysis of Thatcher's references to Bulgaria reveals a consistent ideological pattern underpinning her rhetoric during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Her language simultaneously acknowledges Bulgaria's movement toward democracy and limits its symbolic inclusion within the European community. Through recurring lexical contrasts, syntactic sequencing, and modal formulations, Thatcher constructs a discursive hierarchy of reform that places Poland and Hungary as normative leaders, while positioning Bulgaria as a peripheral, conditional, and derivative case. This linguistic pattern reflects what Fairclough (1992) identifies as the interrelation between discourse and power: Thatcher's utterances not only describe but also *perform* the asymmetrical geopolitics of the post-Cold War order.

By embedding neoliberal concepts – such as "*market economy*", "*plural parties*", and "*rule of law based on human rights*" – into her evaluative vocabulary, Thatcher redefines democracy through a specifically Western, market-oriented lens. Her rhetoric thus legitimizes the West's interpretive authority over the East, enacting what van Dijk (2008) terms *elite control of discourse and knowledge*. Bulgaria's identity, as represented through Thatcher's speech, becomes one of aspiration and conditional belonging: a nation moving in the "right" direction but still awaiting validation.

In this way, Thatcher's discourse participates in the discursive reordering of Europe after 1989. It constructs a Europe divided not by ideology but by degrees of conformity to Western democratic and economic norms. Bulgaria is granted a place within this emerging order, yet only as a *deferred European* – symbolically included but linguistically subordinated. The analysis therefore demonstrates that Thatcher's representations of Bulgaria were not incidental but instrumental in shaping how post-communist transitions were imagined, narrated, and hierarchized in Western political discourse.

Conclusion

The analysis of Margaret Thatcher's discourse on Bulgaria demonstrates how political language functions as a site where ideology, identity, and power converge.

By applying Critical Discourse Analysis, this study has revealed that Thatcher's representations of Bulgaria are not isolated expressions of foreign policy but instances of discursive practice that help shape the moral and geopolitical geography of post-Cold War Europe. Her consistent sequencing of Poland and Hungary first, Bulgaria later – along with modal structures of conditionality and formulaic references to plural parties, rule of law, and market economy – constructs a hierarchy of democratic progress that privileges early reformers and marginalizes slower actors.

Through these linguistic strategies, Thatcher's discourse exemplifies what Fairclough (1992, 1995) terms the ideological work of discourse: the production of consent for a particular vision of social order. In her speeches, democracy and capitalism are presented not as alternatives but as twin requisites for European legitimacy, reproducing a neoliberal understanding of modernization that blurs the boundary between political freedom and market reform. The analysis thus situates Thatcher's rhetoric within a broader Western project of symbolic governance - the use of discourse to define, evaluate, and hierarchize the transitions of others.

At a deeper level, Thatcher's portrayal of Bulgaria as “*different*”, “*not yet*”, or “*still becoming*” reveals how Europe's post-1989 reconfiguration depended on acts of linguistic inclusion and exclusion. As Wodak (2009) and van Dijk (2008) have shown, such constructions are never neutral: they naturalize unequal relations of recognition between the West and its peripheries. Thatcher's language both reflects and enacts this asymmetry, presenting Western democracy as the universal norm and Eastern reform as its deferred imitation.

Ultimately, the CDA demonstrates that Thatcher's discourse on Bulgaria performs a double function. On the surface, it celebrates freedom and reform; beneath that, it encodes the logic of conditional belonging. Bulgaria's Europeaness is affirmed but also postponed – acknowledged rhetorically, withheld substantively. This tension between inclusion and distance encapsulates the discursive legacy of 1989: a Europe linguistically unified but ideologically stratified, where the boundaries of belonging are continually redrawn through language itself.

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