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BAROMETER

Political Parties Development in Bulgaria

Vol.9 Issue 2
April-June 2009

■ The outcome of the election for the 41st National Assembly on the 5th of July 2009 brought about yet another transformation of the party system in Bulgaria. What is being observed with respect to the new Parliament is a virtually new configuration of the political forces, with the dominance of the right-wing parties.

■ GERB has convincingly won the general election and now will take upon itself the political responsibility for the formation of the next Bulgarian government, which will be headed by the party leader Boiko Borissov, himself. The GERB Party fell five parliamentary seats short from winning the absolute majority at Parliament.

■ The BSP suffered a grave loss at the general elections. The party scored one of its poorest results compared to its election outcomes from all elections held thus far. This will bring about serious internal party consequences for the BSP, and is likely to result in a possible transformation of the entire left-wing political environment.

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1. The Political Situation

The MEP elections and the general election for the 41st Bulgarian National Assembly were the major events, which had a paramount impact on the political situation in Bulgaria over the past of a year. These two events predetermined the dynamic development of the processes connected with the evolution of the party system in the country.

The outcome of the MEP elections consolidated the trend observed over the last few years of a growing fragmentation of the party system and an enhanced impact on the part of the smaller parties, which are becoming important players due to their status of possible coalition partners to the bigger parties. Interestingly, this trend was unexpectedly broken in the last week of the election campaign for the July 5th general election and brought about unanticipated results generated mainly by the surge of the GERB wave, which pollster had failed to capture in their surveys.

The MEP elections were won by the GERB Party, which has returned to the European Parliament with 24.36 percent of the votes. "Coalition for Bulgaria" ranks second, its election result being 18.5 percent of the electoral vote. The MRF ranks third with 14.14 percent, followed by the "Ataka" Party with 11.96 percent, NMSP – 7.96 percent, and "The Blue Coalition" – 7.95 percent. These are the parties that will have representatives of their own at the European Parliament. The allocation of the MEP mandates is as follows: GERB – five MEPs, who will join the parliamentary faction of the European People's Party (EPP); "Coalition for Bulgaria" – four MEPs (parliamentary faction of the Party of European Socialists - PES); MRF – three MEP mandates (parliamentary faction of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe - ALDE); NMSP – two MEPs (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe - ALDE); and "The Blue Coalition" – one MEP (parliamentary faction of the European People's Party - EPP). As soon as the Lisbon Treaty is ratified by all EU member countries, however, Bulgaria will avail of an 18th representative at the European Parliament. This mandate will go to "The Blue Coalition" and its second MEP will be Svetoslav Malinov. The electoral turnout at the MEP elections reached 38.9 percent.

The pre-election situation in the country strongly exacerbated the dialogue and relationships among the individual political parties. Thus

for instance, the amendments to the Electoral Law were one of the most hotly debated issues, which were broadly discussed in the public environment as well. The BSP and MRF MPs, with the support of the "Ataka" and "Order, Legality, and Justice" MPs, voted for a law by virtue of which the electoral threshold for coalitions was raised from four to eight percent and at the same time 31 majority vote constituencies were introduced, which territorially coincide with the existing multi-mandate proportional vote constituencies in the country.

One portion of the right-wing opposition and NMSP sharply opposed the amendments and subjected them to vehement criticism. They unanimously accused the BSP and the MRF of making the amendments to the purpose of securing advantage for themselves at the general election. As far as the majority vote constituencies are concerned, criticism was launched in two principal directions: on the one hand, the opponents claimed that this would increase the possibilities for purchasing votes, and on the other, that the election results will thus be distorted because of the different sizes of the individual majority vote constituencies. The Deputy Chairperson of NMSP, Marina Dickova, maintained that the introduction of the 31 single-mandate majority-vote constituencies would promote the vote purchase practices, as this amendment would enhance the role and grip of certain business parties and economic circles on the voters who find themselves under their control.

Representatives of the "Blue Coalition" said that the election of 31 majority vote MPs in a one-leg election, taking place on a single day only and without any run-offs, is in favor of the BSP and the MRF. This is the reason why the parliamentary factions of the UDF and DSB tabled a motion for the majority vote candidates to be elected in two legs, but the motion was turned down by the majority at Parliament.

The bulk of criticism was directed against the increased electoral threshold for coalitions, which – after the legislative amendment – now stands at 8 percent. According to Ekaterina Mikhailova from DSB, "the major purpose of these amendments was to make it possible for the authentic Right Wing to be trapped and destroyed". Similar was the tone of the reaction voiced by the UDF leader, Martin Dimitrov, who accused the governing majority of introducing these amendments with the ulterior motive of scoring "an ex-officio victory".

The "Coalition for Bulgaria" MP, Georgi Bliznashky, was one of the few within the BSP who opposed the raising of the electoral threshold. In his opinion, from a principled point of view, the purpose of the higher threshold is to curb the advance of extremist parties, which work against the constitutional legal order in the country. In the case in point, however, "the higher electoral threshold becomes a tool for retribution directed at the political adversaries".

These parliamentary decisions changed the electoral situation in the country and the strategies of the individual parties accordingly. Because of the higher electoral threshold, certain parties reconsidered their coalition policy. Thus for instance, the "LIDER" ("Liberal Initiative for Democratic European Development") Party left the "Forward" Coalition, where they were considering options for running the general election with the registration of only one of the constituent parties, in order to avoid the higher electoral threshold, which is insurmountable for them at the time being.

President Parvanov also criticized the raising of the electoral threshold and imposed his veto on the debatable text, but the National Assembly overrode his veto. The opposition addressed the Constitutional Court with a motion to make a pronouncement on this issue. The Constitutional Court announced that the higher eight percent electoral threshold for coalitions is anti-constitutional. The major argument of the constitutional judges is that these amendments infringe the principles of party pluralism in the country. As for the majority vote constituencies, which these latest amendments have introduced, the constitutional judges ruled down the objection of the opposition and announced the 31 majority-vote parliamentary mandates legitimate.

What has been observed in the course of this year's general election campaign is an extremely negative phenomenon, which undermines the image of the country, namely the trend of accused persons to run for members of parliament to the purpose of obtaining immunity, which suspends the criminal proceeding pursued by the prosecutor's office against them. This possibility is rooted in the imperfections of the Bulgarian legislation, which allows for accused people to obtain immunity, as long as they run for members of parliament.

This is the reason why the case against the leader of the "Bulgarian Social Democratic Party" and former Deputy Prime Minister from Dimitar Popov's Cabinet, Alexander Tomov, was

suspended. He is charged with the embezzlement of BGN 29 million from the "Kremikovtzi" Metallurgical Works. Other two persons, accused of organizing a criminal group, coercion of women to prostitute, and money laundering, namely the municipal councilors from Varna, Vesselin Danov and Christo Danov (who are father and son), were initially included in the party slate of "United Bulgarian Patriots" for the July 5th general election. Subsequently, however, they pleaded guilty, made a deal with the prosecutor's office, and in the course of summary proceedings were sentenced to serve time in prison accordingly. Vesselin Danov's sentence is to a three years' term in prison, and his son Christo's – to a year's term in prison.

What provoked the most serious public reverberation, however, was the running for Parliament of two notorious businessmen from the town of Dupnitsa – Plamen Gallev and Angel Christov, who were thus granted immunity and their remand measure was modified from remand in custody to bail. These two individuals are better known in the public environment as the "Gallev brothers" and have been accused of extortion, blackmail, and organizing a criminal group. Eventually, they did not make it to Parliament, but they remained free, because the Bulgarian law does not permit their being returned into remand custody.

Another key court proceedings monitored by the European Commission – the case concerning the embezzlement of EUR 7.5 million from the EU SAPARD Program, the main figure in which is the accused Mario Nickolov, was suspended because one of the group of the accused, Ivan Ivanov, was registered as a candidate running for Parliament on the party slate of the "LIDER" Party.

An attempt to be granted immunity and leave his remand in custody was made by another notorious person – Zlatomir Ivanov, better known under his nick-name Zlatko the Barret, on account of the fact that he was registered as an election advocate to the majority vote candidate Ivailo Drazhev. Zlatomir Ivanov is accused of organizing a criminal gang to the purpose of selling illegal drugs.

Another especially negative trend in the Bulgarian political life is connected with the so-called "vote purchasing" and the coercion of voters to cast their ballots for a given party by means of corporate control exerted by certain employers at the MEP elections, and this is a tendency observed not only now, but at

the previous local elections and this year's general election, too. This indicates that the government is incapable of effectively countering this extremely harmful and anti-democratic phenomenon. Moreover, a number of authoritative non-governmental organizations have remained with the impression that the government is insufficiently willing to oppose this phenomenon, which continues to undermine Bulgaria's image. Thus for instance, according to data compiled by "Transparency International", the purchased votes and the controlled vote together make up about 16.4 percent out of all the votes cast by dependent employees at the MEP elections or 415 thousand votes altogether. Vote purchasing has occurred in the form of direct money payments in front of the polling stations (45 percent), by means of paying up long-overdue wages and labor remunerations on the very day of the elections (20 percent), and by means of distributing various food-stuffs to purchased-vote or controlled-vote electorates (15 percent).

What can be mentioned in terms of other forms of controlled vote is: a direct control over the voters by means of voter rolls drafted in advance (36 percent), group ballot casting (27 percent), direct or indirect threats for job cuts among employees (4.5 percent). The most conspicuous example of a corporate vote is connected with the ballots, which have been cast for the LIDER ("Liberal Initiative for Democratic European Development") Party.

The vote-purchase practices continued during the general election campaign as well. The Prosecution Office filed in a number of criminal proceedings cases on account of such practices, and the parties affected by the largest number of such cases are mainly four: the "LIDER" Party, the MRF, the "Ataka" Party, and NMSP.

The presence of the world economic crisis has already become genuinely tangible in Bulgaria as well. The government has officially announced that the country is in recession. What has been observed for a second successive quarter now is a decline of the country's growth rate in comparison with the same period last year. The major problem seems to be the rising unemployment rate. According to data compiled by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, as of the end of March 2009, the unemployment rate stands at about 7 percent. In all likelihood, however, the figure is bigger than that, because practice indicates that not all of the unemployed actually register as such at the respective job

centers and offices. According to the information made available to the Bulgarian Economic Chamber, more than 160 enterprises have already filed for bankruptcy proceedings, whereas a number of businesses will follow suit over the coming months. The republican budget has registered a disturbing level of decline in its revenue part, which will be the major challenge facing the future Bulgarian government.

The sectors of the economy, which are the most severely affected by the crisis, are industry and construction. It is in these sectors namely that the largest number of job cuts has been registered. A decline of revenues in the tourist industry is expected as well. The influx of foreign capital is also much below the levels observed at the same time last year.

The government was subjected to poignant criticism by the right-wing opposition for having failed to update the government budget, as the targets envisaged for the revenue part of the budget will hardly be met. GERB representative declared that should they form the new government, one of the very first steps they would take immediately after the general election would be to review and update the country's budget.

The economic crisis in Bulgaria will be the major challenge facing the new government, which must take adequate measures to protect the Bulgarian economy. In this sense, it is especially important for a stable and functioning coalition to be formed in the next National Assembly, which could set to work without delay immediately after the election.

The GERB Party scored a convincing victory at the July 5th general election and was returned to the new 41st Bulgarian National Assembly with 39.71 percent of the ballots cast. The parties of the tri-partite coalition, which were at the helm of the country's governance thus far, suffered a defeat. The BSP scored its weakest result after the democratic changes – 17.1 percent of the popular vote, and NMSP failed to overcome the electoral threshold by scoring a mere 3.02 percent of the popular vote. The rest of the parties, which have been returned to the 41st Parliament are as follows: the MRF – with an electoral outcome of 14.46 percent, the "Ataka" Party – 9.36 percent, the "Blue Coalition" – 6.76 percent, and "Order, Legality, and Justice" – 4.13 percent. The voter turnout at the general election was significantly higher than the one registered at the MEP elections and exceeded 60 percent.

2. Situation Of The Political Parties And Development Of The Party System In Bulgaria

2.1. The Parties of the Governing Tri-Partite Coalition

2.1.1. The Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP)

The MEP elections were of particular importance for the BSP in its capacity of the largest party in the governing tri-partite coalition. These elections consolidated the position of the party of a second-ranking political force in the country with the 18.5 percent of the electoral vote cast for "Coalition for Bulgaria". In absolute terms, this percentage is equal to 476,618 votes – a little over 60,000 votes than the number of ballots it attracted at the previous MEP elections. In this way, the BSP will have four representatives at the new European Parliament, namely: Foreign Minister Ivailo Kalfin, and the incumbent MEPs Iliana Yotova, Christian Vigenin, and Evgeni Kirilov, who will join the parliamentary faction of the Party of European Socialists (PES).

The main assessment the BSP made about its MEP election outcome can be said to be more on the positive side. The BSP leadership said that the expectations for a grand victory on the part of GERB did not come true, which revealed the fact that the large part of the voters failed to give their support to the party led by Boiko Borissov. They also added that in a situation of a strongly fragmented National Assembly after the general election, it would be difficult to set up a stable coalition, which would have a negative impact on the country at large in the current conditions of an accelerating economic crisis. This is the reason why the party launched an appeal to the rest of the political parties for a responsible political conduct aimed at finding consensus in the name of the national interests.

The BSP put its stakes on an election campaign, the major place in which was allotted to the Prime Minister and party leader, Sergei Stanishev. Stanishev took part in numerous election meetings and events in various settlements of the country. The purpose pursued by the BSP in the course of its election campaign, both for the MEP election and the general election, was to motivate its rock-bottom electorate to give its staunch support to the party, thus helping it to perform well at the elections.

Although in its election behavior the BSP took the stance of a governing party, it put its stakes on a negative campaign with respect to

GERB and the "Blue Coalition". Indicative to this effect are the numerous campaign clips maintaining that a coalition between Boiko Borissov and Ivan Kostov would be detrimental for the country. Undoubtedly the goal pursued by the BSP was to motivate its hard-line electorate, taking the memories of its supporters back to the time when Ivan Kostov was at the helm of the country's governance, which for the majority of the hard-line followers of the socialist party carries nothing but negative symbolism even today.

The opposition right-wing parties also resorted to a negative campaign underlain by strong criticism directed at the government headed by the BSP leader Sergei Stanishev.

In this tense and exacerbated election campaign, what could be observed within the BSP were certain differences between the individual groups in the party. These differences may well escalate after the elections, especially given the situation that the BSP could remain in opposition.

One of the conflict-provoking moments was connected with the drafting of the party slates of Coalition for Bulgaria. The MEP party slates gave rise to tension within the party. Under the strong impact of the party leader, Sergei Stanishev, Ivailo Kalfin was nominated to top the Coalition for Bulgaria MEP party slate, having in mind that Kalfin is not member of the BSP. This brought about indignation among part of the party leadership. Tatyana Doncheva, who has been one of Stanishev's critics over the last few years, declared that she was leaving politics. The specific occasion for this reaction was namely the way in which the BSP party slates for European Members of Parliament were drafted, where a non-electable position back at the slate was offered to her. Doncheva declared that this was not the reason why she was leaving politics, but rather the fact that most decisions in the party were made only by a very close circle of people surrounding the leader Stanishev.

A similar situation was observed at the time of drafting the general election party slates, where Stanishev allocated the electable places to politicians close to him from the younger generation in the party, such as Anton Koutev, Maya Manolova, Cornelia Ninnova, Meglena Plugchieva, Kiril Dobrev, etc. A major figure in the party, such as Ivo Atanassov, was nominated only as a majority vote candidate in the town of Pazardjik, where the BSP has never been a leading political force. Ivo Atanassov, who for long years has been MP from his native Kyustendil

constituency, was replaced by Maya Manolova, who has the advantage of belonging to the inner circle of Prime Minister Sergei Stanishev.

The process of drafting the party slates made other significant BSP figures, mainly representing its civil quota, leave the party. Among them are Evgenia Zhivkova, grand-daughter of communist leader Todor Zhivkov, and the constitutionalist Georgi Bliznashky, whom many qualify as a person from the inner circle of President Parvanov. Both Zhivkova and Bliznashky declared that they were withdrawing from active politics altogether.

Historian Bozhidar Dimitrov, Director of the National Museum of History, officially left the party as well. He joined the GERB Party and was nominated as a majority vote candidate in the town of Bourgas.

A loud debate flared up within the BSP on account of the idea launched by the party leadership to consider the possibility for the leader of the "Euroroma" Party, Tzvetelin Kunchev, to be included in the party slates. A number of local organizations opposed this idea and consequently Kunchev dropped out from the party slates. The Roma leader, Kunchev, who several years ago served time in prison on a sentence for assault and kidnapping, was negotiating with the BSP for his party – "Euroroma" – to be included in "Coalition for Bulgaria".

The priorities included in the election program of the BSP are: the preservation of the country's financial stability and promoting the welfare of Bulgarian citizens. The program also envisages the preservation of the currency board mechanism and joining the Eurozone of the single currency at the current fixed exchange rate of the Bulgarian lev to the euro. What can be seen in the program as well are grand and serious promises of a social and economic nature, such as raising the minimum level of pensions to BGN 200 and the minimum wage to BGN 400 – 450, which is twice as much as the current levels. The average salary is also envisaged to increase twofold – to BGN 900 – 950 at the end of the next four years' term of office, should the BSP be returned to power.

The BSP election program indicates that the power generation sector is one of the major priorities for the party. It is in this sense that the program envisages the establishment of a well functioning and effective national electricity market, a guarantee for the energy supplies provided to industry and the households, investments in the "Maritza Iztok" 1 and 2 Thermal Power Plants, and the completion of the "Be-

lene" Nuclear Power Plant by 2013 – 2014. The program also mentions the development and start-up of a number of energy projects, which the previous party programs contained as well, such as the construction of a liquid natural gas terminal on the Aegean Sea, the implementation of the large-scale pipe-line Nabuko and South Stream projects, and the reorganization of the natural gas extraction field near Cape Galata not far from Varna.

As expected, the BSP remained second at the 5th of July general election. What was unexpected, though, was the great difference between the first ranking party – GERB, which won the general election race with an outcome of almost 40 percent (39.70% precisely) of the popular vote, on the one hand, and the second ranking BSP, which scored about 18 percent (17.70% precisely) of the popular vote, on the other. Thus in a situation of a substantial voter turnout – 60.2 percent, Coalition for Bulgaria will have only 40 MP seats at the 41st National Assembly. The votes cast for the BSP are 747,629, but what is notable here is that all of them are attracted through the proportional vote and not a single one through the majority vote.

On the night following the general elections, the Spokesperson of the BSP, Cornelia Ninnova, said that GERB had won the elections, because it succeeded in consolidating the negative vote in the country. In her opinion, another reason for the success scored by GERB was the current economic crisis and the hope of the voters that it would be the runner-up in the election campaign who could take people out of the crisis. She added that the statements of the BSP coalition partner, Ahmed Dogan, in the course of the election campaign had certainly affected the vote of the Bulgarians and their discontent with Dogan's arrogance was a yet another reason for them to redirect their vote to the GERB Party.

Cornelia Ninnova thanked the voters who cast their ballots for the BSP and said that the election outcome was yet to be analyzed. Her personal conclusion for the underperformance of the BSP at this election was the fact that her party failed to maintain the dialog with the Bulgarian citizens on a daily or at least regular basis.

On the same night, at the party press-conferences following the finalized counting of the 100 percent exit-poll results, the party leader and Prime Minister of the country, Sergei Stanishev, said that he took full responsibility for the performance of his party at the general election. He said he was not handing in his resignation as

party leader because he did not want to look as a captain fleeing from his sinking ship, but anyone who wanted him to resign could file in such a demand before the National Council of the party.

According to journalist Valeri Naidenov, at this election the BSP suffered a tangible “slap on the face” not only because of its pre-election tricks, but also because of the policy it was pursuing at the helm of the tri-partite coalition. In the opinion of Vassil Tonchev, a pollster from the “Sova Harris” Opinion Poll Agency, one of the reasons for the poor result of the BSP was “the inadequately formulated majority vote component” at this general election.

2.1.2. National Movement for Stability and Progress (NMSP)

Despite the opinion poll surveys, which over the last two years constantly indicated that NMSP would prove incapable of overcoming the electoral threshold, the MEP elections turned out to be particularly successful for the party led by Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha. NMSP won nearly 8 percent of the popular vote or 205,146 votes altogether. In this way, the party will have two representatives of its own at the European Parliament: the incumbent European Commissioner, Meglena Kuneva, and Antonia Parvanova.

The reasons for this achievement are comprehensive. On the one hand, NMSP managed to pull through an active election campaign, relying on political marketing and advertising and employing all modern mass media to this effect in the campaign process. On the other hand, however, the reason underlying this high result, unexpected even by the party leadership itself, is the candidature of the European Commissioner Meglena Kuneva, who topped the MEP slate of the party. This indicates that a strong majority vote candidate, such as Kuneva, can single-handedly modify the public attitudes and motivate the hesitating voters to cast their ballots for NMSP. It is also not by chance that it is Kuneva who obtained the largest number of preferences at the MEP elections: 28.5 percent out of all NMSP voters indicated that Kuneva was their preferred candidate.

Kuneva has not announced her decision yet whether she will remain at the post of a European Commissioner or will become an MEP. She said that her final decision would depend on the outcome of the general election.

During the election campaign, NMSP was one of the very few parties that tried to hold a debate emphasizing on the European subject

matter and Bulgaria’s role in the European Union. This is what made NMSP definitely stand apart from the rest of the parties, which preferred to lay the stress on internal political issues mainly.

The NMSP representatives did not conceal their satisfaction with the success they scored. The NMSP leader, Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, declared that this result was legitimate, as it was the product of all the efforts the party had been making for the development of the country over the last eight years. In his opinion, this was precisely the reason why the voters gave such an assessment of the work done by the party, which at the same indicated that the prospects for the future development of the party were substantial. Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha added that he expected NMSP to continue to enjoy an increased support at the general election, too, where the party could achieve an even higher result.

To the purpose of running the general election, NMSP signed an agreement with “The Green Party – the Bulgarian Green”. It is thus that NMSP hoped to obtain additional support at the general election by emphasizing in its election campaign on the environmental subject matter, which is widely supported by the young electorate. The party leadership announced that this agreement was not just a temporary phenomenon by far, because it was founded on common political principles connected with the need for the country to pursue an adequate environmental policy.

In its general election campaign, NMSP put its stakes on its leading figures and ministers who were nominated as majority vote candidates and leaders of the party slates in the various multi-mandate proportional vote constituencies. Thus for instance, Nickolay Vassilev, incumbent Minister of the State Administration and Administrative Reform, topped the proportional party slate in the city of Varna, being at the same a majority vote candidate there. Milen Velchev, ex-Finance Minister, topped the proportional party slate in the city of Plovdiv and at the same time was the party’s majority vote candidate there. Daniel Vulchev, incumbent Minister of Education and Science, topped the proportional party slate in the 24th multi-mandate election region in the city of Sofia and was the party’s majority vote candidate there, too. The Minister of Justice, Meglena Tacheva, topped the proportional party slate in the town of Dobrich. Apart from its leading politicians, NMSP had also included popular faces in its party slates, such as the captain of the national

volleyball team, Plamen Konstantinov, who was both a majority vote candidate and leader of the party slate in the 23rd multi-mandate election region in the capital city.

Although NMSP has been an important player the tri-partite governing coalition, the party managed to distance itself from its coalition partners with respect to certain key decisions passed by the National Assembly, such as the Electoral Law, for instance. These visible disagreements were part of the party's strategy to consolidate its position of a significant political factor and a possible coalition partner upon the formation of the next – most likely right-wing – Bulgarian government.

Unfortunately, the party failed to overcome the four percent electoral threshold at the general election on the 5th of July, which eliminates its chances of sitting at the next Bulgarian Parliament. Its chances of taking part in the new country's government are also infinitesimally small. According to the Deputy Chairman of NMSP, Milen Velchev, the election outcome was a sign that "people obviously needed change". He also explained the general election catastrophe of his party (it scored barely three percent of the popular vote) with the participation of NMSP in the tri-partite governing coalition, which has ruled the country for four years now.

As a consequence of the party's astounding election failure, the party leader, Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, announced that he was handing in his resignation at a special press-conference on the day after the election.

2.1.3. Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF)

At the MEP elections, the MRF won the support of 14.14 percent of the voters, thus taking its traditional place of a third-ranking political force. The party will have three representatives of its own at the European Parliament, namely: Philiz Hyusmenova, Vladko Panayotov, and Metin Kazak. In this way – together with the two NMSP representatives – Bulgaria will have five representatives in the parliamentary faction of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE).

In absolute terms, the party won 30 thousand votes less in comparison with the previous MEP elections in 2007. This gave rise to a number of speculations and attacks on the part of the right-wing opposition parties. They claimed that there has been a transfusion of votes from the MRF to NMSP and the "LIDER"

Party by means of the mechanisms for political control over certain strata of the population. According to the opposition, in this way the MRF aimed to lend support to parties close to itself, with which it intended to govern again in the future. The MRF denied any such transfusion and qualified these attacks as speculative and completely groundless.

What was especially impressive during the MEP election campaign of the MRF was the party's stance with respect to Turkey's membership in the European Union. This issue was raised at the time of several television debates. With a view to the anti-MRF campaign, which certain political parties were pursuing, the MRF representatives were especially cautious in their replies. In their opinion, this subject matter was not topical and did not top the national agenda. Thus for instance, MEP Philiz Hyusmenova thinks that at this stage Turkey cannot be said to be ready for EU membership. According to her, there still were a number of problematic areas in Turkey, such as these connected with the protection of human rights. Hyusmenova voiced the stance that should Turkey fail to meet the EU membership criteria, the country had no chance of joining the Union.

The MEP elections also served to prepare the party for its running the 5th of July general elections. In this sense, the MEP election results, which are somewhat below the electoral capacity of the MRF, can be seen as part of the party strategy and its preparation for "the more important" election for the national Parliament. Thus, the MEP elections result – similar or higher than the 2007 MEP elections – could have served as a strong mobilization tool for the parties, which base some of their legitimacy on the loud anti-MRF rhetoric. It is because of such apprehensions perhaps that the MRF did not mobilize its electoral potential to the fullest at the elections for the European Parliament.

It is not by chance that in the course of the election campaigns – both for the MEP elections and the July 5th general elections – parties such as GERB, 'Attack', and "Order, Legality, and Justice" (OLJ) – launched poignant outbursts of criticism against the MRF. Thus for instance, the main slogan in the "Attack" Party campaign for the MEP elections was "No to Turkey in the EU". The "Order, Legality, and Justice (OLJ)" Party opposed the opening of the large number of polling stations in Turkey for the general election vote and organized a protest rally in front of the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The

OLJ even threatened that they would block the border post crossing with Turkey at Capitan Andreevo in order to stop the buses, which traditionally arrive in an organized manner to Bulgaria every time elections are held in the country.

In the course of the general election campaign, a video clip containing a statement, which Dogan had made at a party election campaign event in the village of Kochan, Satovcha Municipality, appeared in the Internet. The video clip has recorded how in front of his supporters Dogan declares: "I am the instrument in the country's governance who actually allocates the rations of funding in Bulgaria". In the clip Dogan goes on to say that Members of Parliament do not have the real power to handle this allocation. From the point of view of the election campaign situation in the country, it was quite natural for this statement to provoke the serious reaction of the representatives of all opposition parties who launched sharp criticism at Dogan's words.

For his part, Dogan declared that his words were taken out of context and that the opposition parties were engaged in elementary pre-election speculations. He said that he was explaining to his voters what the powers of an MP were: in practice an MP "can only lobby for the extension of subsidies and tranches from the European funds, but he or she has no real power whatsoever to extend such funds". In Dogan's opinion, it is in cases like these that a party leader has an extremely important role to play, because the leader must observe the just and fair distribution of resources, including the reduction of projects from the point of view of effective investments in a specific municipality.

This statement of Dogan's enhanced even further the negative campaign against the MRF, which drew most of the critical fire in comparison with the other two parties of the tri-partite coalition. It is in this way that a number of opposition parties legitimized their election campaigns, which were frequently based on the major motto: the removal of the MRF from power. The new coinage "Doganization" was one of the most frequent qualifications the opposition employed in the election campaign. In the opinion of the opposition, this coinage explains in the most precise way the situation in Bulgaria, which has emerged as a result of the governance from which the MRF has been an inseparable part for a long time now.

According to Ahmed Dogan, these attacks on the part of the opposition only indicate its

ideological weakness and lack of vision for the development of the country. He thinks that as a party the MRF is the product of democracy. In this capacity, it has always worked for the national interests, and to a large extent the achievements made by Bulgaria to date could not have materialized without the participation and support of the MRF.

In this tense situation of criticism and strong attacks at the MRF, the party organized a dynamic election campaign, consisting of numerous functions and events throughout the country, in which the leader, Ahmed Dogan, actively participated. The major task he gave to the supporters of the party was to win half a million votes at the general election. According to the MRF leader, this was a feasible task and objective, which the party needed to accomplish, so that it could further expand its presence in the country's governance.

"Without the MRF there can hardly be stability and a guarantee for the development of democratic values in Bulgaria, however much certain parties may wish to get rid of us." These are the words with which the MRF leader, Ahmed Dogan, at a rally in the town of Kurdjali, commented on the idea of President Parvanov that the most logical governing coalition after the general election would be the one set up by GERB, the BSP, and the MRF.

Dogan cast his vote in a polling station in the town of Kurdjali, where he ran the general election as a majority vote candidate. "I voted with a provisional voting permit, I could not possibly miss the opportunity of casting a ballot for myself", Dogan said jokingly after the vote. He is categorical that there is nothing wrong with the transfusion of votes from one region of the country to another by means of provisional voting permits, as long as the citizens have such a legal right and the law provides for this.

The MRF leader expressed his dissatisfaction that throughout the election campaign all the other parties were poking their nose into his own party affairs. "I myself haven't mentioned the name of a single party", Dogan said. In his opinion, it was the opposition that did half of their pre-election canvassing for them. Moreover, Dogan added that his party was ready to appoint some of the opposition party leaders in the capacity of capable MRF party spokespersons.

Dogan denied having used various tricks to attract voters and enhance his party's voter turnout. "Should that be true", Dogan said, "this means that I'm not doing my job properly. Our

technology in the process of canvassing voters is radically different: we carry out an eye-to-eye-dialog with our supporters, we report to them on what we have done, and make commitments to them for the next stage of our development". With these words, Dogan revealed to journalists his party's election technology and went on to explain what exactly he meant in the village of Kochan by claiming that he was allocating the funds in question. "The major responsibility for 40 municipalities is mine, and each and everyone who speculates on this particular subject matter should look at himself in the mirror" was the advice the MRF leader finally gave.

This technology has obviously worked for him because after this general election the MRF is the third ranking party in the country once again and its results have improved in comparison with the previous election. The MRF has captured 14.47 percent of the popular vote, which in numeric terms means 610,808 votes, whereby 90,000 of these votes were cast in Turkey (or 63 percent of the overall number of votes cast abroad). At the next National Assembly the MRF will have 38 parliamentary seats (out of which 33 were won by the party's proportional vote candidates and 5 – by the majority vote candidates).

But on the background of the undoubted success Dogan's party has scored at this general election, many observers are asking the question whether the leader's ambition and arrogance has not played a nasty trick on the MRF, isolating it from the political life in the country, as no party in the foreseeable future is much likely to have Dogan as a partner in a possible coalition.

2.2. The Opposition Parties of the Right-Wing Political Environment

2.2.1. The GERB Party (GERB)

The GERB Party won the MEP elections and thus Boiko Borissov's party consolidated itself as the first-ranking political force in the country. GERB was returned to the European Parliament with 24.36 percent of the popular vote, or 627,693 votes altogether. In comparison with the previous 2007 MEP elections, GERB has enlarged its support by a little over 200,000 votes. In this way, the party will have five representatives of its own at the European Parliament, who will join the parliamentary faction of the European People's Party (EPP). These representatives are: the incumbent MEPs Roumyana Zheleva and Vladimir Ouruchev, economist Illiana Ivanova, Emil Stoyanov – broth-

er of the ex Bulgarian President Peter Stoyanov, and political scientist Maria Nedelcheva.

At the official press-conference following the MEP elections, the party leader, Boiko Borissov, thanked all GERB supporters and said that the party had scored remarkable success. In his opinion, the success could have been even greater, had the voter turnout been larger, but this did not happen because of the unwillingness on the part of the BSP and the MRF to hold the MEP elections and the general election on the same date. Borissov appealed to voters to go to the polls in larger numbers at the general election, giving their support to the GERB Party. The Sofia City Mayor declared that his party was the alternative to the tri-partite coalition and the proof to this was the caustic and negative campaign waged against him in person and GERB as a whole on the part of the BSP and the MRF.

In the course of the MEP election campaign, Borissov broke his leg and tore a muscle, which prevented him from actively participating in the events organized by the party.

As far as the general election campaign of the GERB Party is concerned, what is interesting here are the candidates, on whom the party had staked its success. The noticeable names on the party slates are those of the renowned artist Vezhdi Rashidov, who tops the party slate in the mainstay of the MRF – the town of Kurdjali, the famous historian Bozhidar Dimitrov, who is the majority vote candidate in the town of Bourgas and tops the party slate in the city of Varna, police chief Krassimir Petrov – majority vote candidate in the city of Varna, where the Chairman of the party, Tzvetan Tzvetanov tops the party slate. The latter runs as a majority vote candidate in the town of Veliko Turnovo, too. GERB also relies on its numerous party coordinators who now top the party slates in their own constituencies.

Boiko Borissov himself did not compete at the general election and thus was not included in any of the party slates. To the numerous questions whether he would become Prime Minister should GERB win the election, Borissov said that he was leaving the reply for after the election and added that this was up to the Bulgarian voters.

After the MEP elections, the "Blue Coalition" raised the idea about nominating joint majority vote candidates with the GERB Party, so that a maximum number of majority vote right-wing MPs could be returned to Parliament. On the basis of the MEP election outcome, "The Blue Coalition" suggested that GERB should nominate the majority vote candidates in three quarters of

the constituencies, and “The Blue Coalition” – in the rest of the constituencies. According to “The Blue Coalition”, if GERB ran the election with majority vote candidates of its own, it would win seven MP seats, and they would win one. Should they run the election with joint candidates, however, the two parties could return a total of 20 majority vote MPs to the new Parliament.

GERB turned down this proposal and appealed to “The Blue Coalition” to give its support to the GERB candidates instead. The UDF and DSB qualified GERB’s proposal as unacceptable and an attempt on the part of the GERB Party to assimilate them. It is thus that the two right-wing political forces nominated majority vote candidates of their own, despite the fact that this contained the danger of dissipating votes, of which the BSP and the MRF could have easily availed.

Over the last few months GERB was accused – even by “The Blue Coalition” – of displaying contradictory views on the development of the Bulgarian economy. The latest economic program presented by GERB, however, reveals clear and specific priorities elaborated in the spirit of the orthodox right-wing economic policy.

GERB’s economic program pays attention to three major starting premises, such as: lowering the level of social security contributions paid by employees and employers alike, lowering the amount of necessary capital for the registration of new businesses, and curbing all unnecessary public expenditures. In the opinion of GERB representatives, the social security contributions in the country should drop by five percentage points, the major objective being for employers to preserve jobs in the conditions of an economic crisis.

With its latest economic program GERB aims at stimulating business and it is to this purpose that the government must free more room for business activities. It is also in this sense that the party envisages to curb the current number of licensing regimes.

A priority of GERB’s economic policy is the preservation of the currency board mechanism until the time the country officially joins the ERM2 currency regime of the Euro-zone. This is the reason why the party says it would not allow for any budget deficits to occur, because this is one of the major requirements making a country eligible to join the Euro-zone of the European Union.

“The Blue Coalition” commented that GERB’s new economic program comes close to their visions about the development of the Bul-

garian economy, which can be a very good basis for a future joint governance of the country.

At the July 5th general election GERB proved to be the party of the largest political support in this country. It won an overwhelming victory by returning 116 MPs to the new National Assembly, out of whom 90 have been elected by proportional vote, and another 26 – by majority vote. GERB’s overall election outcome stands at 39.71 percent of the popular vote, which means that the party has attracted more than twice as many votes as the BSP has. Thus GERB is only 5 MP seats short of an absolute parliamentary majority. The observers came to call this unexpected surge “the GERB wave”.

Given this strong popular support, the informal leader of the party, Boiko Borissov, said at the press-conference on election night that he was ready to assume the responsibility of heading the next Bulgarian government, adding that his government would like to rely on the parliamentary support of at least two of the smaller parliamentary right-wing parties, “The Blue Coalition” included, and it was to this purpose that he intended to start talks with them, virtually as soon as the Central Election Commission would have officially announced the election results. These talks must not contain conditions and horse-trading, though, according to the leader of the party.

2.2.2. “The Blue Coalition”

The coalition set up between the UDF and DSB, which was also joined by several other smaller right-wing parties, was given the name of “The Blue Coalition” and it was under this name that it was registered to take part both in the MEP elections and the general election for the 41st Bulgarian Parliament.

The past quarter was especially dynamic and laden with contradictions for “The Blue Coalition”. To a large extent this was due to the internal party bickering and wrangling within the UDF, which made it difficult for the coalition as a whole to develop, unfold, and pursue an effective MEP election campaign.

The problems generated within the UDF were mainly due to the conduct of the former party leader, Plamen Yururkov, who together with Plamen Radonov registered the UDF as an independent participant at the MEP elections. This was made possible following a ruling of the Sofia City Regional Court that Martin Dimitrov was elected UDF Chairman illegitimately on the motive that the party primaries for UDF leader failed to com-

ply with the party statute. The UDF leadership announced the court ruling to be a political order allegedly made by the tri-partite governing coalition, aimed at suspending them from running at the MEP elections. That was the reason why the Central Election Commission initially refused to register the UDF with leader Martin Dimitrov as an inseparable part of "The Blue Coalition".

"The Blue Coalition" accused Plamen Yurukov of fulfilling an order in favor of the MRF and the BSP. Yurukov denied the allegations and explained his decision to register the UDF as an independent participant at the MEP elections as an attempt to counter the "take-over" of his party by Ivan Kostov. In Yurukov's opinion, running the MEP elections in a coalition with DSB would only result in the evaporation of the UDF as a party altogether.

At a first glance, Plamen Yurukov's conduct seemed paradoxical and contradictory. More than a year ago, he himself gave up the leadership post in the UDF on the motive that the party no longer backed him up. On the eve of the elections, however, he once again "recognized" himself as the UDF leader who fights and defends the interests of his own party.

The UDF appealed the decision of the Central Electoral Commission concerning Yurukov's registration before the Sofia City Regional Court where several times the judges issued self challenges to prevent themselves from presiding over the respective administrative court panels. Thus the problems with the UDF registration lasted for more than a month to the very day on which the deadline for registering parties and coalitions, willing to run the MEP elections, expired. Finally, the Chairman of the Supreme Administrative Court, Konstantin Penchev himself, took up the case and issued a ruling whereby the UDF with leader Martin Dimitrov was given the right to be registered to run the MEP elections as an inseparable part of "the Blue Coalition".

"The Blue Coalition" was also joined by the "United Agrarians" party of Anastassia Mozer, the social democrats of Nichrizov, and the Radical Democratic Party.

The problems with the UDF registration had a negative impact on the election campaign of the entire coalition. Instead of conducting their election campaign, the UDF leadership had to deal with unnecessary court proceedings. This brought about the de-motivation and indecision of the party voters.

Despite all these difficulties, however, "The Blue Coalition" won 7.95 percent of its support-

ers' vote, making up a total of 204,817 votes. This makes it possible for the coalition to send one representative of its own to the European Parliament, namely: Nadezhda Mikhailova – the former Foreign Minister in the Cabinet of Ivan Kostov (1997-2001) and former UDF leader. The UDF could have returned a second MEP, but it fell short of a little more than 300 votes to accomplish this. After the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, however, Bulgaria will have an 18th representative at the European parliament and this will be Svetoslav Malinov from DSB (now "The Blue Coalition").

"The Blue Coalition" declared that they were satisfied with the election outcome with a view to the problems, which had been accompanying their MEP election campaign. The leadership of the coalition expressed their certainty that at the general election their results would be even better and thus their new political entity would become a factor for the establishment of a right-wing government of the country.

Despite the positive assessments voiced by the leadership, the MEP election outcome of "The Blue Coalition" is approximately the same as the two parties – the UDF and DSB – individually had at the previous MEP elections two years ago. During this year's campaign, the representatives of "The Blue Coalition" were declaring that their goal was to rank third at the MEP elections. At end of the elections, they finished sixth instead, even after NMSP. It is highly likely for this result to have been affected by the problems with the coalition registration and also by the internal strife within the UDF concerning the drafting of the party slates for the July 5th general election.

It is the party slates that brought about a serious internal political row connected with the party leader, Martin Dimitrov. Despite the party decision to take into account the party primaries as the determining factor for the nomination of the MP candidates, the party slates were rearranged.

This resulted in a sharp indignation expressed by the representatives of the Sofia City UDF organization who accused Martin Dimitrov of having infringed the statute of the party. Martin Dimitrov topped the party slate in the 24th multi-mandate constituency in Sofia, although he had been elected to top the party slate in the city of Plovdiv.

The regional UDF organization in the town of Rousse also loudly expressed their discontent on account of the party slates in their own constituency. The local UDF leadership accused Martin Dimitrov of having single-handedly replaced

from the top of the slate Roumen Christov, who had unanimously won the first place at the UDF primaries in their region, by Mikhail Mikhailov.

Despite all these protests, the party slates remained modified and the modifications were voted for by the National Executive Council of the UDF. These contradictions, however, may well have negatively affected the results of "The Blue Coalition" at the general election for the 41st National Assembly.

During the general election campaign, "The Blue Coalition" presented its program for the governance of the country, which sets out the major priorities upheld by the coalition partners. The program outlines the three biggest risks, which the Bulgarian economy faces in the conditions of a global crisis, namely: the budget deficit, the corporate bankruptcies, and the growing unemployment rate. This is the reason why the most important economic priority from the very first days of the future Cabinet will be the updating of the country's government budget. "The Blue Coalition" also said that one of the most important tasks of the country's governance will be to restore the lost confidence of the EU institutions in Bulgaria as a whole. This can be done by discontinuing the practices of political corruption and improving the mechanisms for prevention and control.

In the area of healthcare, the proposal of "The Blue Coalition" is for the de-monopolization of National Health Insurance Fund and for the creation of several health insurance funds competing among themselves.

Among the other steps, which "The Blue Coalition" promises to take should they become part of the next country's governance, is to re-structure the civil administration to the purpose of optimizing its functioning. What they envisage to this effect is to close down several ministries, such as the Ministry of State Administration and Administrative Reform, the Ministry of Emergency Situations, the Ministry of European Integration, and the Ministry of Culture.

According to Ivan Kostov, an agreement with the International Monetary Fund could be signed only if this becomes absolutely necessary, because otherwise that would be a bad signal for investors.

As far as the projects connected with the country's infrastructure are concerned, the priorities here are the construction of the "Thracia", "Hemus", and "Struma" motorways.

"The Blue Coalition" declared that all its members were determined to work hard for the formation of a right-centrist government, which

is the only type of government capable of taking the country out of the current economic crisis and of restoring the confidence of the European Union in the new member country Bulgaria.

The overall election result of "The Blue Coalition" after the July 5th general election turned out to be below their expectations. In numeric terms, the outcome is as follows: 15 MP seats, out of which 10 are of the UDF and five of the DSB, on the basis of the 285,418 ballots cast for them, or 6.76 percent of the popular vote. All of the parliamentary mandates of "The Blue Coalition" were won by virtue of the proportional vote. Ivan Kostov's dream of winning the majority vote in the 24th constituency of the capital city did not come true. He was left behind the majority vote candidates of the GERB Party and the BSP.

2.2.3. The Small Right-Wing Parties

The MEP election results indicated the growing electoral impact of the smaller right-wing parties and coalitions. Thus for instance, the "LIDER" Coalition set up between the "Liberal Initiative for Democratic European Development" (LIDER) Party and "The New Time" obtained 5.7 percent of the popular vote and came only short of returning a representative of its own to the European Parliament. The "Order, Legality, and Justice" (OLJ) Party of Yane Yanev also showed a relatively good performance and obtained 4.67 percent of the popular vote, which reveals its potential with a view to the July 5th general election.

For others of the small right-wing parties the results were truly disappointing. This brought about the disintegration of parties and coalitions and to their re-grouping in new formations to the purpose of political survival and making it to the next Bulgarian Parliament. Thus for instance, after the conclusion of the MEP elections, the "Forward" Movement, which got 2.25 percent of the voters' ballots, disintegrated altogether, and the individual constituent parties began to look for other allies with whom to run the general election. The IMRO joined the "Order, Legality, and Justice" Party (OLJ), whereas Lyuben Dilov's "Georgovden" Movement gave up running this general election altogether. However, the "Georgovden" Movement said that they were giving their support to "The Blue Coalition".

In practice, the New Bulgarian Democracy (BND) Party of the MPs from the 40th National Assembly, who split from NMSII, disintegrated as well. The party got a mere 0.45 percent of the votes cast at the MEP elections. Individual BND figures were nominated as majority vote candi-

dates for the general election race by other parties. Thus for instance, the leader of the BND party slate at the MEP elections became the majority vote candidate of the "LIDER" and „The New Time" coalition in the town of Montana constituency. For its part, "The Blue Coalition" gave its support to the BND MP Valentin Miltenov, who ran the general election as an independent candidate nominated by an initiative committee.

The result scored by the "LIDER" and „The New Time" coalition at the MEP elections was among those most widely discussed in the public environment. For the first time ever since the beginning of the democratic changes in Bulgaria the country saw such a vote – to a large extent corporate vote in its nature, which was cast for a political party. The "LIDER" Party (the abbreviation of which coincides with the Bulgarian word for "leader") obtained this result owing to the control businessman Christo Kovachky has over his thousands of workers. At the same time, Kovachky is currently subject to criminal proceedings for the draining of VAT in especially large amounts. "LIDER" has obtained its highest results in the regions where the employees of Kovachky have voted. The protocols of the polling stations compiled by the central Election Commission indicate that 74.45 percent out of all voters have cast their ballots for "LIDER" in the town of Bobov Dol (where Kovachky owns a Thermal Power Plant), and the same pattern is repeated in the 'Roudnichar" (the Bulgarian word for "miner") neighborhood of the town of Pernik constituency, where 75.2 percent of all the votes have been cast for "LIDER", and again in the village of Roudnik (the Bulgarian word for "mine"), where 73.5 percent of the votes have again been cast for "LIDER".

Kovachky himself denied having coerced his workers to vote for "LIDER" by declaring that he only "asked" them to do so, and added that he saw nothing wrong with such a request. The "LIDER" Party was accused by other right-wing parties of having also obtained votes controlled by the MRF leader, Ahmed Dogan.

What should not be underestimated when we speak about the MEP election result of "LIDER" is the contribution of its coalition partner – "The New Time" and the leader of the party slate – Emil Koshloukov. Throughout the MEP election campaign, Koshloukov enjoyed one of the highest ratings of Bulgarian politicians and it is not by chance that he got more than 32 thousand votes in the "LIDER" party slate by means of preferential voting.

Unlike "LIDER", quite different reasons underlie the MEP election result of the OJ Party. The party leader, Yane Yanev, put his stakes on a wholly populist campaign, in this way attracting protest voters mainly. The major slogan of the OJ in its MEP election campaign was "Stop corruption". Yanev's popularity was constantly growing over the last few months because of the numerous facts he revealed about corruption practices in the country, which – in their turn – turned into leading mass media news. On the other hand, Yanev heavily relied on his aggressive anti-MRF rhetoric and on claims that what was taking place in the Western Rhodopes, inhabited mainly by ethnic Turks and Bulgarians professing the Moslem religious denomination, was an ongoing process of Islamization.

The general election campaigns of these two parties underwent certain modifications – less visible for the "LIDER" Party and more prominent for the OJ. In the final account, "LIDER" failed to overcome the four percent electoral threshold, managing to capture a little over 3.26 percent of the electoral vote. If the voter turnout had not risen as high as it actually did, the party might have made it to the new Parliament. On the other hand, the failure of the "LIDER" Party is a perfect illustration of the fact that vote-purchasing is ineffective in a situation of a massive voter turnout.

For its part, the general election campaign of the OJ party stressed on the professional qualities of its candidates and tapped on the anti-corruption rhetoric. After its intensive election campaign, the OJ finally made it to Parliament, scoring 174,563 electoral votes cast for it, or 4.13 percent of the overall number of votes.

2.2.4. The "Ataka" Party ("Attack")

The MEP elections consolidated the electoral positions of the "Attack" Party as one of the leading parties in Bulgarian politics. Volen Siderov's nationalists were returned to the European Parliament on 11.96 percent of the actual votes or 308,053 votes in numeric terms altogether. In this way, "Attack" has increased its election result in comparison with the 2007 MEP elections by more than 30,000 votes. In the new European Parliament, the party will have two representatives of its own: Dimitar Stoyanov and Slavi Binnev, who were sitting in the previous EP as well.

Volen Siderov made a positive assessment of the outcome scored by the party. In his opinion, "Attack" has consolidated its positions and has manifested the fact that it has a hard-core elec-

torate of its own and is continuing to expand its electoral impact.

The MEP election campaign of the "Attack" party was conducted under the motto of "No to Turkey in the EU". According to Volen Siderov, Turkey is a threat both for the European Union and Bulgaria's national sovereignty. He thinks that instead of holding talks for the accession of Turkey to the EU, the EU institutions should rather work in the direction of a future integration with Christian countries such as the Ukraine and Byelorussia.

One of the main emphasis in the MEP campaign of "Attack" was connected with the demand for the repayment of compensations by Turkey to the amount of USD 15 billion to the Bulgarian refugees from Thracia who fled to Bulgaria after the First World War.

Furthermore, "Attack" will insist before the European Parliament for the Ottoman yoke in Bulgaria to be recognized as genocide perpetrated on the part of Turkey against the Bulgarian population.

The general election campaign of the "Attack" Party, however, shifted its stress, switching it from European policies to predominantly domestic issues. With respect to the formation of the future governing coalition in Bulgaria, Volen Siderov declared that the "Attack" Party will "adopt a constructive approach and will manifest its national responsibility" by expressing its readiness to cooperate with "all Bulgarian parties".

The rhetoric of the party leader continues to be marked by the softening of his radical speech, which has become characteristic for him over the last two years. It is in this direction, too, that we must interpret his appeals to the rest of the political parties for national agreement on the key issues connected with the development of the country. Of paramount significance among them are Bulgaria's economic development and combating corruption, according to the leader of the "Attack" Party.

One of the election proposals of the party concerns job cuts in the civil administration and closing down several executive agencies, which – in Volen Siderov's words – "serve the only purpose of securing jobs and administrative positions for party functionaries".

At the end of the term of office of the 40th National Assembly, the parliamentary faction of the "Attack" Party disintegrated, having been left by its MPs Vanyo Hurkov and Georgi Dimitrov. In this way the party remained with nine MPs only, whereas it takes 10 MPs for a parliamentary fac-

tion to exist. The reasons why the two MPs left the "Attack" parliamentary faction is connected with the fact that they were not included in the general election party slates. Hurkov and Dimitrov accused Volen Siderov of having arranged the party slates completely on his own and in an authoritarian fashion – without taking into consideration the structures of the party throughout the country.

Despite this party infighting, the general election campaign of the nationalist party was less shrill than usual and capitalized on anger at corruption, poor living standards, tapping at the same time on the ethnic debate. At the same time it was also accompanied by lurking suspicions of vote purchasing.

Now that the general election is over, the "Attack" Party will avail of 21 Members of Parliament at the new 41st National Assembly who have been returned to Parliament by virtue of 395,656 ballots cast for them or 9.36 percent of the overall electoral vote. This result means that the party now ranks fourth among all the political forces in the country.

3. Public Opinion

3.1. MEP Election Results

What the outcome of the MEP elections indicates in Bulgaria is a trend for the further development of electoral attitudes. Especially interesting are the social portraits of the voters for the individual parties. Indicative in this respect are the data compiled from the exit-poll, which the opinion poll agencies held at the time of the MEP elections. The information presented below is based on the data compiled and processed by the "Alpha Research" Opinion Poll Agency.

The social profile of the voters for the GERB Party, which won the MEP elections, indicates that it is the party mostly preferred by young people and people below 50 years of age. As far as the size of the settlement is concerned, GERB has obtained its largest support in the regional centers of the country. In the capital city, Sofia, and in the small towns, GERB also enjoys a good level of support. This indicates that GERB is represented in a relatively uniform fashion on the entire territory of the country. In terms of the educational level of the GERB electorate, the "Alpha Research" data show that mainly people of secondary and higher education have cast their ballots for the GERB Party.

At these MEP elections, much like at the previous 2007 MEP elections, the social profile of the BSP electorate approximately matches the

same characteristic features as those it has been displaying over the last several years. It is still the older generation mainly that predominantly votes for the BSP, whereby people exceeding 60 years of age are 40 percent of the BSP voters and they primarily inhabit the villages and the smaller towns. Nearly 20 percent of the people voting for the BSP live in Sofia and as many live in the regional centers of the country. This indicates that the BSP is still proving incapable of asserting itself as an attractive political force for the younger generation of Bulgarians.

The "Alpha Research" exit-poll results show that approximately a third of the NMSP voters are representatives of the middle class and are mainly civil servants in the state and municipal administration or employees of private companies. These are the social groups, which stood to gain most from the economic growth and the financial stability over the last few years, when NMSII, then renamed to NMSP, was in the country's governance. The age composition of the NMSP electorate shows that middle-aged people prevail here. In terms of material wealth, the NMSP supporters are people of medium and higher incomes, and two thirds of them live in the capital city and the regional centers of the country. As far as the educational level of the NMSP electorate is concerned, the individuals of higher or secondary education are the prevailing number here.

The "Alpha Research" exit-poll results also indicate another interesting trend, which to a large extent explains the strong support extended to Meglena Kuneva and Antonia Parvanova at the MEP elections, namely: two thirds of the NMSP voters are women.

The social profile of the electorate of "The Blue Coalition" contains no big surprises and only consolidates the trend observed over the last several years as far as the supporters of the two major parties in the coalition – the UDF and DSB – are concerned. Thus for instance, nearly two thirds of "The Blue Coalition" voters inhabit the large towns and cities of the country, and more than a half of them live in the capital city Sofia. In comparison with the rest of the parties, the voters for "The Blue Coalition" are marked by the highest educational status. Approximately 60 percent of them are people of university or higher education, and only four percent of them are people of elementary education. A similar profile can be observed with respect to NMSP, but as far as "The Blue Coalition" is concerned this profile is more prominently expressed.

The age composition of "The Blue Coalition" electorate shows that people of middle and older age prevail here, whereas the share of the younger supporters has been slowly but steadily declining.

The social profile of the MRF electorate confirms the trend registered at all elections held in the country after the onset of the democratic changes. More than 80 percent of the MRF voters are village dwellers, 46 percent of them are of pre-high-school or lower education, and 83 percent are representatives of the Turkish ethnic minority. Attempts to open the MRF to the Bulgarian ethnic population have been registered at these MEP elections, too. If only two percent of the Bulgarian cast their votes for the MRF at the 2001 general elections, at the current MEP elections as many as nine percent of them have given their support to the MRF. This is due to the MRF involvement with the governance of the country, because of which a number of Bulgarians and also representatives of business have been looking for opportunities to build a political career, to obtain post and positions, and gain economic dividends by means of the political patronage, which this party secures.

The voters for the "Attack" Party are people with secondary education or of a lower educational level, they inhabit small settlements and regional towns. The data compiled by the "Alpha Research" Agency indicate that two specific age groups stand out in the age profile of the "Attack" electorate: the first one is of young people between 18 and 30 years of age, and the second one is made up by people exceeding 50 years of age. The younger voters have most probably been attracted by the patriotic rhetoric and flamboyant political conduct of the "Attack" Party, whereas the voters of middle age give priority to subject matters such as corruption, the social and economic problems of the country, and the impoverishment of the population.

3.2. General Election Results

The voter turnout at the July 5th general election reached 60.20 percent, mainly owing to the youth vote, according to the National Center for Opinion Poll Surveys.

Six are the parties, which have been returned to the 41st Bulgarian National Assembly according to the data of the Central Election Commission, now that 100 percent of the electoral protocols arriving from all over the country and from abroad have been processed.

The voters who have cast their ballots for GERB are 1,677,870 out of the total number of voters at the general election, which gives GERB a total of 39.71 percent of the electoral vote. This guarantees the party 116 Members of Parliament, which means that GERB will need just another five MPs in order to form a governing majority consisting of 121 parliamentary votes.

Coalition for Bulgaria has received 747,849 ballots cast for its candidates or 17.71 percent of the electoral vote. The ballots cast for the MRF are 610,831 or 14.46 percent of the electoral vote. "Attack" has been returned to parliament with 395,656 ballots cast for it, or 9.36 percent of the electoral vote. The ballots cast for "The Blue Coalition" are 285,418, or 6.76 percent of the popular vote. The sixth party returned to Parliament is "Order, Legality, and Justice", which has received 174,563 ballots cast, or 4.13 percent of the electoral vote.

Thus, at the 41st National Assembly GERB will have 116 MPs, the BSP – 40 MPs, the MRF will have only two MPs less than the BSP or 38 MPs altogether, the "Attack" Party will have 21 parliamentary seats, "The Blue Coalition" – 15 MPs, and the OJ – 10 MPs.

Below the four percent electoral threshold remain: the "LIDER" Party with 3.26 of the electoral vote, and the current coalition partner of the BSP – NMSP – with 3.02 percent of the electoral vote.

These are only interim result, because the data from the electoral protocols are currently entered in the computer system for the second time, and the final results will be announced by the Central Election Commission within the legally provided four days' period of time. By July 10th, the Central Election Commission will have also verified the number of double-voting individuals.

The valid ballots cast abroad are about 153,500. Out of them, 91,550 have been cast in the 123 polling stations opened in Turkey. The vote distribution of the ballots cast abroad for the parties returned to Parliament is as follows: the MRF – around 93,920 votes; GERB – 33,420 votes; "The Blue Coalition" – 9,050 votes; the "Attack" – 6,250 votes; Coalition for Bulgaria – 3,880 votes; "Order, Legality, and Justice" – 1,580 votes.

The percentage of invalid ballots for the majority vote candidates is about five percent, and the percentage of invalid ballots for the proportional vote candidates is about 2.2 percent. The invalid ballots cast abroad are 2,600 altogether.

3.3. Final General Election Results Announced by the Central Election Commission

On the 8th of July 2009, the Central Election Commission announced the following final results from the election for the 41st National Assembly according to the respective number of the party ballot of each individual party or coalition:

- № 1 - "Order, Legality, and Justice" – 4.13 % (174,582 votes) - 10 proportional vote Members of Parliament;
- № 2 - "LIDER" Political Party – 3.26 % (137,795 votes);
- № 3 - GERB – 39.70 (1,678,641 votes) - 116 Members of Parliament (26 majority vote MPs and 90 proportional vote MPs);
- № 4 - MRF – 14.50 % (610,521 votes) - 38 Members of Parliament (5 majority vote MPs and 33 proportional vote MPs);
- № 5 - Attack – 9.36 % (395,733 votes) - 21 proportional vote Members of Parliament;
- № 6 - Coalition for Bulgaria - 17.70 % (748 147 votes) - 40 proportional vote Members of Parliament;
- № 7 - "Zashtita" ("Defense") Union of Patriotic Forces - 0.15 % (6,368 votes);
- № 8 - NMSP – 3.02 % (127,470 votes);
- № 10 - "Bulgarian Left-Wing Coalition" – 0.21 % (8,762 votes);
- № 11 - Party of the Liberal Alternative and Peace (PLAM) – 0.07 % (2,828 votes);
- № 12 - Political Party THE GREEN – 0.52 (21,841 votes);
- № 13 - "Social Democrats" Political Movement – 0.12 (5,004 votes);
- № 15 - Political Party "The Other Bulgaria" – 0.08 % (3,455 votes);
- № 16 - Alliance of Bulgarian Patriots - 0,05 % (2,175 votes);
- № 17 - Political Party "National Movement for the Salvation of the Fatherland" – 0.04 % (1,874 votes);
- № 18 - Bulgarian National Union – People's Movement – 0.09 % (3,813 votes);
- № 19 - "The Blue Coalition" – 6.76% (285,662 votes) - 15 proportional vote Members of Parliament;
- № 20 - "For the Motherland" – Civil Initiative Movement – People's League – 0.27 % (11,524 votes).

4. Major Conclusions And Forecasts

1. The outcome of the election for the 41st National Assembly on the 5th of July 2009 brought about a yet another transformation of the party system in Bulgaria. What is being observed with respect to the new Parliament is a virtually new configuration of the political forces, in which the right-wing parties dominate. Apart from GERB, which won an overwhelming and categorical victory at this general election, the two other right-wing parties – “The Blue Coalition”, the successor to the authentic Right Wing, and Yane Yanev’s party “Order, Legality, and Justice”, a conservative and right-centrist political formation, have now been returned to the new Parliament and can thus become the guarantee to a solid and broad right-wing parliamentary majority.

The Left Wing, embodied by the BSP, is going into opposition after the heavy loss it sustained at the general election. The Liberal Center, which consolidated its positions over the last several years after the emergence of NMSII, has practically disappeared, because the renamed party of Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha – NMSP – failed to overcome the four percent electoral threshold.

Yet again, this election confirmed the exceedingly unstable nature of the party system in Bulgaria – a trend, which has been observed for the last 10 years. It is for the second time after NMSII that a new political party has convincingly won the general election. Another visible sign of this instability is the fact that not a single party in this country has managed to win a second term in office after the onset of the democratic changes back in 1989.

2. GERB has convincingly won the general election and now will take upon itself the political responsibility for the formation of the next Bulgarian government, which will be headed by the party leader, Boiko Borissov, himself. The GERB Party fell five parliamentary seats short from winning the absolute majority at Parliament and this is the reason why it will now have to look for the support of the other two right-wing parties. The options Borissov has are several. His most likely one is to set up a government with the participation of “The Blue Coalition”, as the two parties are members of the European People’s Party. On the other hand, however, Borissov is likely to get even broader support at the very procedure of voting for the new government. Yane Yanev from the OLI has already declared that he would lend Borissov his party’s unconditional support and this support will be

given without any mandatory participation in the new government whatsoever. It is quite possible for the “Attack” Party to lend its support to GERB at the time of the voting procedure for the new government as well.

The reasons for Borissov’s categorical victory, which proved to radically differ from the preliminary expectations of the numerous pollsters, political scientists, and observers, are predominantly due to several factors. On the one hand, it is the exacerbated election set-up precisely, with the constant media news about vote purchasing in substantial amounts, about controlled vote practiced by corporate parties, such as the “LIDER” party, etc., that enhanced the public sensitivity in the direction of a higher voter turnout and the casting of a protest vote. It is this protest vote namely that GERB has managed to capture. On the other hand, the statements made by Dogan and the reverberations that followed in the public environment enhanced people’s interest in this particular election and motivated voters to cast their ballots against the entire tri-partite coalition.

Currently, both GERB and Boiko Borissov face the challenge of meeting the high expectations of the electorate at large and each single individual who has given his or her support to the GERB Party in particular, and these expectations are mainly connected with combating corruption and organized crime.

On the other hand, GERB will take the helm of the country’s governance in an extremely difficult situation – at a time of a growing economic crisis. This will be the hardest test for GERB and its government both in the short-term and medium-term time perspective. One of the very first steps the government is expected to take is to update the country’s government budget.

3. For “The Blue Coalition” the election outcome is a possibility for the authentic Right Wing to return to the country’s governance once again. The results the coalition obtained, however, widely differ from the expectations of the coalition leaders who had set much higher goals to themselves. One of the reasons underlying this situation is the fact that a large number of the leading figures in “The Blue Coalition”, such as Ivan Kostov and Ekaterina Mikhailova for instance, are seen by voters as “politicians who belong to the period of transition”. In other words, they bear the same downsides actually borne by the politicians from all the rest of the parties, which participated in the political life of the country dur-

ing the 1990s. An indication of the fact that Bulgarian voters are looking for new political figures that have nothing to do with the transition, which is still painful for many, is the election outcome for the new party – GERB.

On the other hand, the election outcome of “The Blue Coalition” was also affected by the internal party strife within the UDF. Now that the general elections are over, the problems within the UDF may get a new turn and development again, because certain influential figures in the party did not make it to Parliament, due to the single-handed rearrangement of the party slates by the UDF leader, Martin Dimitrov. It is possible for some UDF representatives, who stood against the participation of the party in “The Blue Coalition”, to make an attempt at ousting Martin Dimitrov from the leadership post altogether at the forthcoming primaries this fall. A possible participation of “The Blue Coalition” in the future government, however, could consolidate Martin Dimitrov’s positions, permitting for the party to rally around him and isolate the dissenters.

4. The “Order, Legality, and Justice” Party managed to overcome the four percent electoral threshold owing to the populist rhetoric and conduct of its leader, Yane Yanev. Over the past months, Yane Yanev’s popularity was constantly growing in result of his anti-corruption rhetoric. He remained in people’s minds with his succession of revelations about acts of corruption, which were subsequently publicized by the media. This definitely focused the public attention on Yanev and put him in the limelight, thus enhancing his image, especially having in mind that only a year ago he was one of the less popular politicians and was merely seen to belong to the ADF parliamentary faction.

5. The BSP suffered a grave loss at the general election. The party scored one of its poorest results compared to its election outcomes from all elections held thus far. This will bring about serious internal party consequences for the BSP, and is likely to result in a possible transformation of the entire left-wing political environment.

The reasons underlying this election defeat are varied – some of them go deeper, and others stem from the specific situation. One of these reasons is connected with the poor public image of the tri-partite coalition and the substantial problems with corruption in Bulgaria. The BSP supporters were disappointed with the policy their party was pursuing because of the high social expectations they had

at the time it came to office. These expectations, however, failed to materialize due to the pragmatic policy the party had to implement together with its coalition partners.

In order to consolidate his positions, over the last several years Stanishev closed himself within a narrow circle of devotees, which actually brought about the encapsulation of the BSP and the break-up of dialog with party members and supporters alike. The latest rows connected with the rearrangement of the election party slates, to which a number of local organizations openly opposed, are just another proof to this effect.

On the other hand, the BSP made a mistake with its strategy for the general election. What the party expected was a repetition of the results from the MEP elections, where the distance dividing GERB and the BSP was not that big. This resulted in the underestimation of the actual situation and provoked, in its turn, the arrogance of the party leadership and first and foremost – the self-important attitude demonstrated by the Prime Minister and BSP leader Sergei Stanishev, who was pursuing an extremely negative campaign against the major political entities of the Right Wing.

What lies in store for the BSP is the possible activation of the groups around Roumen Ovcharov and Roumen Petkov in the direction of holding Stanishev accountable for the election defeat. It is probable for President Parvanov, too, to have some say and affect the future processes within the BSP with the levers of impact he has over the party.

6. After the general election, the MRF will remain in political isolation. The reasons why are the strong public attitudes against this party, which was an inseparable part of two successive governments. The MRF has created a public image of an organization, which generates its policy “in the dark” and “behind the wings”, not without the “assistance” of a number of statements made by its leader, Ahmed Dogan. The latest of these statements, that it was Dogan who “distributes the rations of funding in the country” was especially scandalous and provoked loud public discontent. It is precisely this self-aggrandizing and arrogant behavior, which Dogan manifests at moments, that sharply exacerbated the election campaign. What Dogan aimed at was to boost the motivation of his electorate to the possible maximum and he succeeded in doing so very well indeed: the MRF has won its highest elec-

tion result thus far, but this was done at the cost of the party's political isolation. The MRF has been steadily and constantly expanding its electoral presence into the regions inhabited by Bulgarian ethnic population throughout all the years it participated in the governance of the country, mostly owing to the clientelist practices it has been so skillfully promoting. Now that it will be in opposition, the party is likely to "shrink" back within the limits of its own ethnic electorate.

7. NMSP failed to overcome the four percent electoral threshold, which means that the party will most probably face its political death. These results only confirmed the thesis that the election success of NMSP at the MEP elections is mainly due to the candidature of Meglena Kuneva who received a strong majority vote in her capacity of a worthy person. What lies in store for NMSP from now on is the ordeal to survive as a party, which has remained outside the national Parliament. That will be particularly hard, because to be able to function, the party has thus far relied on its being in office. Besides, this political formation itself has been constructed as an electoral party, which mobilizes its resources only at the time of elections.

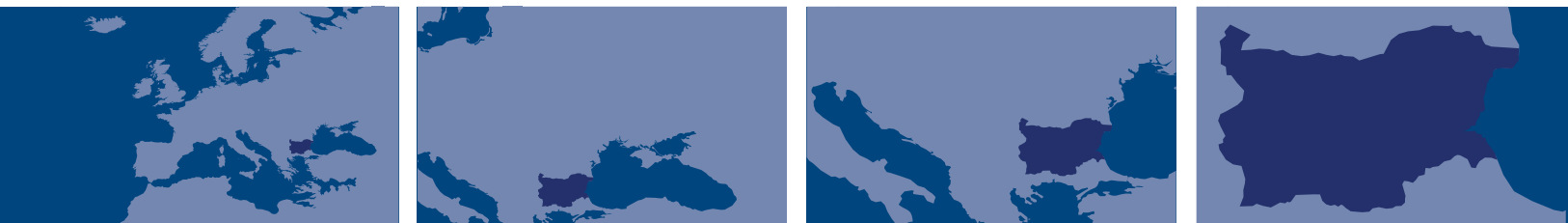
The NMSP leader, Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, handed in his resignation and will most probably retire from active politics altogether. This will bring about party infightings for the leadership post among the various groups existing within the party. It is quite likely for a number of influential politicians to leave the party as well, or to retire from politics much like their leader just did. Many of them came to the party from the academia or from the various business circles, and now they can easily return to their previous occupations.

8. Yet again, at this general election the "Attack" Party consolidated its electoral positions, but nonetheless it failed to expand its electoral impact. The reasons why, are that other political parties, mostly GERB and Yane Yanev's OJ, made use of messages typical for the rhetoric employed by "Attack", such as the anti-MRF talk and the appeals for combating corruption. The "Attack" Party hoped that in a situation of a fragmented Parliament the two major parties could invite "Attack" to become their coalition partner, should need be. Given the current situation, however, "Attack" faces two options: to give its informal support to the future right-centrist government without actually being involved in it, or becomes its oppo-

nent. Should "Attack" choose the option of going into opposition to GERB and the Right Wing, this would result in a turn to the left and the deployment of a social and populist leftist rhetoric, such as the party has been demonstrating of late. Indicative for such a possible turnaround is the party's election program, which contains a number of extremely left-wing economic visions.

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