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B A R O M E T E R

Political Parties Development in Bulgaria

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■ The political situation over the last quarter of 2009 was mainly determined by the political acts undertaken by GERB in its capacity of a governing party. This quarter also saw the completion of the first 100 days of the government's term of office, which made observers, proponents and opponents strike various balances and give rise to different assessments. The high level of public support for the government after its first hundred days in office has been preserved as an ongoing tendency. What can be observed at the same time, however, are the first genuine symptoms of disillusionment as well, which is mainly connected with the economic situation in the country and the deepening crisis.

■ Over the last quarter of 2009 the "Attack" Party lived up to its recently gained reputation of being the most loyal and consistent supporter of the GERB Party and its government. A proof to this effect is the support extended by Volen Siderov's party to Yordanka Fandakova – the candidate of GERB at the mayor's by-election in the capital city. At the same time, a number of local party structures continued to express enhanced discontent with the policy pursued by their leader, Volen Siderov.

■ After the BSP Congress, at which Sergei Stanishev was re-elected leader of the party, the situation of internal party differences and conflicts has actually deepened. Despite Stanishev's re-election, his legitimacy and the confidence rating he enjoys among the broad electorate and rank-and-file party membership have increasingly been shrinking.

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1. The Political Situation

The political situation over the last quarter of 2009 was mainly determined by the political acts undertaken by GERB in its capacity of a governing party. This quarter also saw the completion of the first 100 days of the government's term of office, which made observers, proponents and opponents strike various balances and gave rise to different assessments.

The opposition was particularly critical in its evaluations, and its general assessment for the first hundred days of the Cabinet headed by Boiko Borissov was voiced in an entirely negative tone. The BSP declared that GERB had failed to take any real measures for curbing the economic crisis and was launching instead PR campaigns, thus behaving as if the party was still waging its election campaign.

The right-wing parties, which support the government, were more sparing in voicing their assessments. The Blue Coalition insisted on a stronger governmental commitment with respect to curbing the consequences of the economic crisis and yet again said that they were ready to lend their support and expert assistance to both the government and the governing parliamentary majority.

The "Attack" Party was the one which gave the highest assessment in relation with the first hundred days of the GERB Cabinet in office. The main reason for the content expressed by "Attack" concerns the dedicated commitment of the GERB Party to investigate the activities of the previous tri-partite governing coalition. In the opinion of the "Attack" Party, the first charges brought up against representatives of the previous government indicate that GERB has the political will to bring the combat against corruption and organized crime to a successful end.

The high level of public support for the government after its first hundred days in office has been preserved as an ongoing tendency. What can be observed at the same time, however, are the first

genuine symptoms of disillusionment as well, which is mainly connected with the economic situation in the country and the deepening crisis.

The most important task facing the government was to draft the republican budget for the next calendar year. The aim of the macroeconomic framework proposed by the Cabinet was to guarantee the financial stability of the country and create genuine prerequisites conducive for the country's overcoming the current economic crisis. At least this is the claim made by the Minister of Finance, Simeon Dyankov. He reckons that in the middle of next year the country will start to slowly and gradually come out of the crisis.

At its first reading, the draft government budget tabled by the Cabinet was passed with no deliberations whatsoever in the plenary hall of Parliament, because the opposition left the plenary session as a sign of disagreement with the entire expenditure side of the budget. The opposition, however, was present at the second reading voting procedure and launched sharp critical remarks against the government for having tabled a right-wing budget, which holds the potential of bringing about a social crisis because of its strongly restricted expenditure side, curbing first and foremost the social expenditures the government is expected to make.

Next year's budget envisages a deficit of BGN 2.58 billion in the current account of the national budget, compared to BGN 3.58 billion deficit of the current account in 2009. The direct foreign investments forecast for next year amount to BGN 3.3 billion (or 10.2 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product), given the fact that the expected amount of investments for the current year stands at BGN 3 billion (or 9.2 per cent of the GDP). The budget forecast for the 2010 revenues stands at BGN 26.39 billion or 41.6 per cent, compared to the BGN 25.96 billion (or 40.7 per cent of the GDP) for the current year.

The macroeconomic framework of the budget also envisages an increase of the

minimum monthly social contribution concerning the self-employed from BGN 260 to BGN 420. The maximum monthly amount for which social security contributions will be paid remains at the level of BGN 2,000. The minimum and maximum levels of the unemployment benefits remain unchanged – BGN 120 and BGN 240 respectively. The budget envisages a 2.5 per cent decline of the employment rate as well, and the expectations are for the unemployment rate to reach 11.4 per cent. The minimum wage has also preserved its 2009 level and will stand at BGN 240 throughout 2010, too.

The macroeconomic framework of the 2010 government budget tabled by the GERB Cabinet is indicative of the optimistic expectations, which the governing majority entertains with respect to the economic situation in the course of the coming year. Should these optimistic forecasts for the budget indicators fail to materialize, however, this will have an adverse impact on the revenue side of budget.

The political situation was also affected by the implications of one of the biggest rows thus far concerning the judiciary branch of power in the country. The row is connected with revelations stemming from certain appointments of administrative heads to the various law-courts and prosecutor's offices in the judicial system all over the country as a result of the lobbyist activities among some of the members of the Supreme Judicial Council by a person totally unknown so far of the name of Krassimir Georgiev, who became popular in the public environment under the nickname of Krassyo the Black. Printouts of Krassimir Georgiev's telephone conversations indicate that he repeatedly talked with representatives of the Supreme Judicial Council and other magistrates, who afterwards were appointed as administrative leaders of various law-courts and prosecutor's offices.

As soon as this information was made public, it provoked an enormous row, which seriously undermined the image of the Supreme Judicial Council. As a re-

sult, the members of the Supreme Judicial Council accepted the resignations of its members Stoiko Stoev and Ivan Dimov, and those of several law-court administrative leaders, such as Dora Chineva, Angel Angelov, and Plamen Naidenov, who handed in their resignations precisely on account of their contacts with Krassimir Georgiev. The three administrative leaders, however, will function in the capacity of ordinary judges and prosecutors respectively for another month, until the Supreme Judicial Council makes a decision whether disciplinary proceedings will be filed against them.

Upon further investigation of the case in point it became clear that Krassimir Georgiev has also had contacts with politicians from the former tri-partite governing coalition.

Another major event, which shaped up the development of the political situation in the country, were the local by-elections of municipality mayors in different regions, whereby the local by-election for a Sofia City mayor legitimately occupied the center stage in this process. The election campaign in the capital city was sluggish and boring and this was mainly due to the expectations that the runner-up from the GERB Party, Yordanka Fandakova, would win a landslide victory here, as she actually did.

The exacerbation of relations between President Georgi Parvanov and Prime Minister Boiko Borissov provoked strong political reverberations. In a number of his public appearances, President Parvanov voiced critical remarks against the government, which were promptly countered by Borissov's response. The relations between the two got especially aggravated when the Cabinet demanded that the Bulgarian ambassadors in Turkey and the USA be recalled on account of infringements committed during the general election polling procedure in these respective countries. Initially, President Parvanov refused to sign the recall decrees. This is the reason why DSB and the "Attack" Party raised a demand for the impeachment of the Presi-

dent. At first, GERB and Boiko Borissov also supported this idea, but subsequently the Prime Minister and his party withdrew this support. Finally, both DSB and the "Attack" Party gave up their initiative, because there was no legal ground whatsoever for officially tabling and setting in motion such an impeachment procedure.

After a meeting held between President Parvanov and Prime Minister Borissov, the relations between the two seem to have been smoothed over for the time being, but it is quite possible for new differences to occur between them in the foreseeable future.

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

2.1. The GERB Party

Over the past quarter, the GERB Party managed to consolidate its political and party domination within the Bulgarian party system. At the local by-elections, held to elect new mayors of municipalities, the mayors of which were returned to Parliament after the June 2009 general election, GERB won a convincing victory. As expected, the GERB candidate for the capital city mayor's seat, Yordanka Fandakova, won a straight victory at the first leg of elections, without any of the familiar run-offs, with 66 per cent of the votes, against the nearly 27 per cent of the ballots cast for the BSP candidate, Georgi Kadiev. In the town of Vratza, the GERB candidate, Doctor Kostadin Shakhov, emerged victorious at the mayor's election, and again it was GERB candidates who won the mayor's elections in the towns of Razlog and Pravetz, Krassimir Gerchev and Nickola Nittov respectively.

Representatives of the GERB Party expressed their satisfaction with the election outcomes. Boiko Borissov declared that the ballots cast for GERB were the most eloquent assessment of the country's citizens about the first hundred days in office of the new government. In his opinion, the success of his party at the local by-elections

has confirmed GERB's domination in Bulgarian politics for yet another time.

What has been observed over the past quarter is the increasingly larger concentration of power in the hands of Boiko Borissov. At the time being he has unconditional command over the Cabinet, the party, and its parliamentary faction. Despite the fact that his government is actually a minority government, Borissov seems to have found an effective mechanism for political control, capable of exerting pressure over his partners from the right-wing political environment. Borissov has been employing a single major argument with respect to his partners, namely: his frequent publicly made threats that should they fail to support him, he was ready to provoke an early general election.

The media appearances of Prime Minister Boiko Borissov create the impression of a politician who is in a situation of an ongoing election campaign. For the time being this works effectively and brings success to the Prime Minister, but in future he has to make recourse to genuine actions, if he really wants to preserve the level of public support he has been enjoying thus far. It is in this sense that the police actions crowned with the arrest of a big criminal gang that for a long time has been in the business of kidnapping, robberies, and other crimes, is a genuine success for the Prime Minister and his Minister of Interior.

During the past three months, Prime Minister Borissov had to effect some changes in his Cabinet. After Yordanka Fandakova was elected Sofia City Mayor, Boiko Borissov appointed Sergei Ignatov, formerly Fandakova's Deputy Minister, to succeed her at the post of Minister of Education, Youth, and Science. Ignatov shouldered the ambitious task of reforming higher education in the country and is currently drafting a new Higher Education Bill. The major objective of the envisaged amendments is to grant a higher level of autonomy to the universities and to introduce an overall reform in the sys-

tem of awarding academic and research degrees and titles.

The appointment of a new Minister of Foreign Affairs will be shortly effected as well. The incumbent Minister, Roumyana Zheleva, who was nominated by the GERB Party as the future Bulgarian European Commissioner, was given the portfolio of Commissioner for international cooperation, humanitarian aid, and response at times of emergencies. Roumyana Zheleva said that this was a good portfolio in the large area of building a common European foreign policy. In her opinion, now that the Lisbon Treaty has come into effect, the European Union will pursue a common European foreign policy and the post she was offered will contribute to the new foreign policy role of the EU.

The fact that this portfolio was given to Bulgaria provoked the opposition to launch criticism against Boiko Borissov's government. The Chairman of the BSP and former Prime Minister of the country, Sergei Stanishev, qualified the post allocated to Roumyana Zheleva as "insignificant". Stanishev criticized Borissov for not having nominated Meglena Kouneva, who enjoyed the unreserved confidence of the European Commission during her term of office as a Commissioner for Consumer Affairs. In Stanishev's opinion, had Kouneva been the Bulgarian nomination, the country would have been given a better commissioner portfolio.

In the meantime Roumyana Zheleva was also elected Deputy Chairperson of the European People's Party. This enhanced even further GERB's position at the EPP and for yet another time confirmed the high assessment the European Right Wing has given to the party currently governing Bulgaria.

As far as one of the most debatable issues related to the energy policy of Bulgaria is concerned, Boiko Borissov announced that both projects – "Nabucco" and the "South Stream" could be developed in parallel and in his opinion this was the way in which Bulgaria would be capable of pursuing an

independent energy policy, despite the substantial Russian investments in the Bulgarian energy sector of the economy. At the same time, Borissov reiterated his reservations with respect to the Bourgas – Alexandroupolis project.

2.2. The Blue Coalition

In November, one of the constituent parties of the Blue Coalition, the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF), held its regular National Conference, on the territory of which there was a clash of the positions of the UDF leader, Martin Dimitrov, and the internal party opposition, embodied by the Sofia City UDF organization. The Sofia UDF organization voiced once again its criticism of their party's coalition with Democrats for Strong Bulgaria (DSB), because it was ineffective and harmful for the UDF. Martin Dimitrov expressed his counter-thesis that this coalition was the right way of establishing actual interaction between and among the parties belonging to the traditional political right wing in Bulgaria.

The National Conference of the UDF adopted a political resolution as well. It says that the tri-partite coalition government of the BSP, NMSP, and the MRF has imposed an oligarchic model of governing the country, the functioning of which is underlain by a number of corruption practices. This has placed the country in a situation of a serious political and economic crisis. What is needed in order to overcome the adverse consequences of the former governance practices are both transparent policies and the cooperation of the right-wing political parties.

Some amendments to the party statute were also introduced at the November 2009 UDF National Conference, the focus of which were mainly the provisions aimed at tightening the internal party discipline. Thus for instance, should a party member voice an anti-UDF opinion in the media environment, the party leadership, other leadership representatives, or the National Council itself will be empowered to expel such a member from the party. Such an expel-

ling will be legitimate, if the Control Council has issued an opinion to this effect and two thirds of the members of the National Council have voted for it. The delegates to the National Conference voted for another decision to the effect that the local party structures will also be entitled to a portion of the government subsidy granted to the party. The subsidy will be allocated between the head office of the party and the district councils in a proportion endorsed by the National Council.

The amendments to the party statute also envisage a specific duration of the term of holding the leadership post in the party, which cannot exceed two terms of office of 4 years each. Should, however, a decision of the National Council be made requiring an extension of this fixed term of office, the party leader can continue to function in this capacity for more than two terms of office.

The 2009 UDF National Conference decided that the primaries for party leader would be held on November 29th. The primaries were eventually won by the incumbent party leader, Martin Dimitrov, who was returned to the post with about 55 per cent of the votes cast. The rest of the candidates for the leadership post were: the mayor of the "Vitosha" borough of the capital city, Lyuben Petrov, Roumen Christov, who only a year ago was the major opponent of Martin Dimitrov for the leadership post, and the former UDF MP Ivo Tzanev.

After the primaries, Lyuben Petrov remained second nation-wide with an outcome of about 23 per cent of the votes. In Sofia, however, Petrov won the primaries with the majority of the votes cast, whereas the outcome for Martin Dimitrov in the capital city did not exceed a total of around 30 per cent.

The number of people eligible to vote at the UDF primaries for party leader was 11,400 and this is actually the total number of the UDF party membership as of today. A year earlier, the number of party members who were eligible to vote was

two thousand less. The primaries showed that the political line of the party imposed by Martin Dimitrov enjoys the support of the party membership. Despite the growth of the UDF membership in absolute terms, the political future of the UDF remains unclear with a view to the increasingly stronger dominating role, which Ivan Kostov has come to play in the Blue Coalition. The fact that the Blue Coalition decided not to nominate a candidate of its own at the autumn by-elections for Sofia City mayor can bring about the political effacement or even obliteration of the two constituent parties making up the Blue Coalition. This could weaken and disillusion its electorate, which has traditionally been the strongest in the capital city. To a large extent this predominantly refers to DSB due to the fact that the majority of the electorate supporting Ivan Kostov's party come from the capital city mainly.

On the other hand, the Blue Coalition has been entering the executive branch of power increasingly more tangibly. Thus for instance, Constantin Dimitrov from DSB was appointed Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs to replace Krassimir Kostov, who handed in his resignation because of the recent revelation that he used to be an agent working for the totalitarian State Security Services.

An important event of considerable significance for the Blue Coalition and first and foremost for DSB was the coming into effect of the Lisbon Treaty. Now that it is finally in force, DSB will have a representative of its own at the European Parliament, namely Svetoslav Malinov, former DSB MP at the Bulgarian Parliament, who has been waiting for this to happen ever since the May 2009 MEP elections.

After the row with the Supreme Judicial Council, connected with the lobbyist activities of certain circles to promote certain appointments in the judicial branch of power, DSB tabled a motion for implementing reforms in the judiciary. One of these party proposals concerns the reduction of the duration of the terms in of-

fice of the heads of the Supreme Court of Cassation, the Supreme Administrative Court, and the Chief Prosecutor from 7 to 5 years. Because of the lobbyist row precisely, DSB has insisted on the replacement of all members of the incumbent Supreme Judicial Council.

2.3. The "Attack" Party

Over the last quarter of 2009 the "Attack" Party lived up to its recently gained reputation of being the most loyal and consistent supporter of the GERB Party and its government. A proof to this effect is the support extended by Volen Siderov's party to Yordanka Fandakova – the candidate of GERB at the mayor's by-election in the capital city.

At the same time, a number of local party structures continued to express enhanced discontent with the policy pursued by their leader, Volen Siderov. Thus for instance, ten representatives out of the 13-member "Attack" Party faction at the Municipal Council in the town of Bourgas left the party faction to become independent municipal councilors. The major reason underlying their act and their leaving the party altogether is their disagreement with the unconditional support, extended by the "Attack" MPs and their leader Volen Siderov to the GERB Party.

Valeri Simeonov, the leader of the group, which split up from the "Attack" municipal council faction, said that Siderov's support for the GERB Party is actually support for the MRF as well, as thus far the government has not sought any responsibility for the infringements committed by the MRF and its leader, Ahmed Dogan. The "Attack" municipal council faction in the town of Bourgas is currently made up of three "Attack" representatives only – councilors Dimo Groudev, Deyan Stoikov, and Alexander Boyadjiiski. Leader of the newly established municipal council faction of the independent councilors is the journalist Valentin Kassabov.

The "Attack" Party leadership demanded to receive a report accounting for the activities of the Bourgas municipal council-

ors elected on the "Attack" party slate. In reply Valeri Simeonov declared that neither he nor his colleagues have been elected by the leadership of the "Attack" Party or by Volen Siderov himself and if they owe somebody a report accounting for their activity, this somebody is their electorate.

Another town in which the "Attack" faction of municipal councilors split up is the town of Plovdiv. The faction leader, Todor Christev, who is also Deputy Chairman of the Municipal Council, and Elena Raicheva officially announced that they were leaving the party and were becoming independent municipal councilors. The major reason underlying their act – in Todor Christev's words – was their disagreement with the policy pursued by the "Attack" leader Volen Siderov, who had turned the party into "a family organization striving for personal enrichment". According to Christev, in this way the party was heading towards the obliteration of all ideas it had openly declared to uphold. Christev also shared another reason for his leaving the party as well – disapproval of the pressure exerted by the central leadership of the party on the Plovdiv local structure, the purpose of which was the re-orientation of the current cooperation with the IMRO towards cooperation with the GERB Party.

Over the past few months, Volen Siderov has been actively working on achieving progress on the issue of enhancing the international legitimacy of the "Attack" Party. This is the reason why Siderov met Gianfranco Fini, leader of the National Alliance centre-right party and President of the lower Chamber of Deputies at the Italian Parliament. After the meeting Siderov said that the Italian experience could be especially useful for all Bulgarian parties as well.

According to Volen Siderov, every time general elections are held, there should be an alignment of forces to the purpose of preventing any scattering of votes. The Italian case – in Siderov's opinion – indicates that such an alignment does not bring about any collapse of the individual

party identity, because it is the party leaders precisely who defend the identity of their parties. Siderov thinks that the Bulgarian political leaders, who currently support the GERB government, headed by Boiko Borissov, will grow up and embrace this idea, too. According to the "Attack" leader, it is in this way that the consolidation of votes can be achieved, because it is clear that a single party is incapable of "owning" the entire power in a country, nor can it work without the assistance of other like-minded parties. In the opinion of Volen Siderov, however large the support which GERB has managed to muster at the general election, it is obvious that Borissov needs other political forces in order to attain the priorities he has planned to implement in the governance of the country during his own term of office.

The "Attack" Party launched an initiative, which has been its long-standing commitment and was included again in the party program for its 2009 general election campaign, namely: the removal of the Turkish language news from the broadcasts of the Bulgarian National Television. Volen Siderov declared that he stood for summoning a nation-wide referendum on the issue concerning Turkish language news. Siderov announced this idea after a meeting he held with Prime Minister Boiko Borissov in the presence of the President of the National Assembly, Tsetzka Tsacheva. In the opinion of Boiko Borissov, this is a delicate issue and has been subject to political speculations, and this was the reason why it had to be solved in the most equitable and democratic manner possible. Borissov emphasized that the Bulgarian Constitution explicitly states that the official language in this country is Bulgarian. In his opinion, each minority in the country could demand that it be allotted some media time for broadcasts in Armenian or Hebrew, and the Roma population also had the right to insist for news in their own language.

Referendum in Bulgaria can be organized on the initiative of one fifth of the Members of Parliament. According to

Siderov, the subscription for the referendum was ready and what remains to be done is to table the referendum motion in Parliament and put it to the respective voting procedure. In support of his motion for removing the Turkish language news from the air of the National Television, Siderov referred to the examples of Germany and Switzerland. In his opinion, in these two countries it was accepted for the public media to broadcast only in the official languages of these countries. This did not preclude, however, the possibility for broadcasts in Turkish to be aired by regional or private mass media.

The initiative launched by the "Attack" Party met the strong disapproval of the opposition, the Bulgarian President, and the "Law, Legality, and Justice" Party headed by Yane Yanev. In the opinion of President Parvanov, holding a referendum on the issue of the Turkish language news broadcasts is a peripheral question and given the situation of an economic crisis, which the country is currently going through, such an idea only aimed at distracting the attention of the society from other much more important issues. The Movement for Rights and Freedoms said that they were determined to address the Constitutional Court in connection with Siderov's demand for referendum.

After the negative reactions against such a referendum voiced throughout this country and especially in the countries from the European Union, Prime Minister Borissov gave up the idea of holding a referendum on this particular subject, which has dealt a serious blow on the prestige of the "Attack" Party.

2.4. The "Law, Legality, and Justice" Party (OLJ)

The past quarter was particularly dramatic for the OLJ Party. In the middle of December, the OLJ parliamentary faction, led by Yane Yanev, disintegrated, having been officially left by its member, MP Mario Tagarinsky. The reason why is the fact that before Tagarinsky's resignation from the OLJ, the party's parliamentary

faction was made up by 10 MPs, which is the absolute minimum for the existence of any parliamentary faction. According to the by-laws of the incumbent National Assembly, new parliamentary factions – different from those registered at the Central Electoral Commission – cannot be set up, and an MP cannot be member of more than one parliamentary faction. Despite this limitation, the OLI leader made a forecast that by the end of the term of office of the 41st National Assembly, his parliamentary faction would consist of about 25 – 30 MPs. Yane Yanev's optimism is prompted by the pending decision, which the Constitutional Court is shortly expected to make, with respect to these texts precisely, which have recently been laid down in the by-laws of the incumbent National Assembly on the initiative of the governing majority.

On the other hand, the OLI leader said that a parliamentary faction should be made up by a minimum of 8 MPs, because only 209 MPs have been returned to Parliament by virtue of the proportional vote system. It is in this connection that at the National Assembly Yanev tabled a motion containing a text, which Parliament is asked to vote, concerning an amendment to the parliamentary by-laws making it possible for eight MPs to be able to establish a parliamentary faction of their own.

In the opinion of Yane Yanev, it is Boiko Borissov who – willingly or not – lurks behind the act of Tagarinsky's leaving the OLI parliamentary faction. Yanev threatened that the OLI supporters would launch protest actions all over the country, unless the OLI parliamentary faction was restored in due time. Yane Yanev substantiated his suspicion that Borissov was behind the parliamentary attack against his party with the following explanation: In his capacity of Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on Conflict of Interests, Yanev intended to voice information that facts existed about the incompatibility of six ministers of Borissov's Cabinet with the office they were appointed to at the date Parliament voted

for the incumbent government. This means that these six top government officials have signed under untrue facts and information in their declarations for lack of conflict of interests. What Yanev specifically means are the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Roumyana Zheleva, the Minister of Education, Youth, and Science, Sergei Ignatov, the Minister of Finance, Simeon Dyankov, the Minister of Environment and Waters, Nona Karadjova, the Minister of Culture, Vezhdi Rashidov, and the Minister of Regional Development and Public Works, Rossen Plevneliev.

The representatives of the OLI Party voiced their poignant reactions against the disintegration of their parliamentary faction. MP Dimitar Abadjiev's accusations against the GERB Party were the most extreme. He said that Borissov's party "was acting as a junta" and was making attempts to impose its single-party governance over the entire country. MP Atanas Semov spoke much in the same vein, mentioning that as far as he could see, the country was heading towards a single-handed form of governance.

Mario Tagarinsky motivated his decision to leave the OLI parliamentary faction by pointing out his disagreement with the opportunistic policy pursued by the party and its leader, Yane Yanev. In Tagarinsky's opinion, the party has become strongly personified and is being driven by unclear objectives and vague principles, frequently prompted by temporary situations and by considerations formulated on the spur of the moment. Tagarinsky refuted Yanev's accusations that he had been put under pressure and emphasized that his decision to leave the OLI parliamentary faction was "a well considered act".

After the disintegration of the OLI parliamentary faction, the party lost the posts it had been allocated in the various parliamentary committees and was deprived of the post of one of the Deputy Speakers of the National Assembly, which thus far was occupied by Atanas Semov.

As early as the beginning of October, the OLI Party gave its first signals that it in-

tended to change its stance with respect to the support it was extending to the GERB Party. The nomination of architect Pavel Popov as the OJ candidate for Sofia City Mayor at the local by-elections was made precisely with this intention in mind. Yane Yanev said that his party was nominating a technocrat, capable of being an alternative to the rest of the politically bound candidates for mayor. At the day of the by-election, Architect Popov won 2.8 per cent of the electoral votes.

2.5. The Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF)

Over the past three months, one of the topics amply exploited in the public environment was connected with the hypothesis about the existence of a tacit agreement between the GERB Party and the MRF, the purpose of which was to prevent the possibility of pressing any charges against representatives of Dogan's party and prevent the possible investigation of the notorious circles around the MRF. The reasons underlying the existence of such doubts are that GERB focused its efforts at auditing the activities of the previous government on the BSP only, touching a little on NMSP as well, but omitting the MRF altogether.

This hypothesis, however, proved to be somewhat unsubstantiated, because charges were pressed against representatives of the MRF, too. The Prosecutor's Office pressed these charges against the MRF MPs Gyunai Sepher and Mithat Tabackov. Both have been accused of document fraud involving especially large amounts of money. The qualification of their charges is grave infringements of the public procurement procedures concerning the construction of road and water sewerage systems. The MPs were deprived of their parliamentary immunity and the remand measures imposed on them are freedom against the daily obligation to sign in person at the police station, as well as the restriction to leave the country.

Before Tabackov and Sepher got returned to Parliament in June 2009, they

functioned in different capacities: the former was Mayor of the town of Doulovo, and the latter was regional Chairman of the MRF in the town of Silistra. One of the scandalous cases, which has been connected with the name of Tabackov, is the project for the sewerage system of the town of Doulovo, which was awarded funding from the EU Environmental Operational Program to the amount of BGN 37 million. The project was won by the Jemmy Company, the commercial director of which is Sali Tabackov, brother of Mithat Tabackov. It is because of this case that Mithat Tabackov has been investigated for a criminal offense qualified as abuse of office. The Prosecutor's Office said that the Jemmy Company has won the competition in contradiction to the Public Procurement Act.

Tabackov is subject to another criminal investigation as well, where Gyunai Sepher is also among the suspects. One of Sepher's companies was awarded a public procurement contract for the construction of a road from the village of Okorsh, Doulovo Municipality, to the highway connecting the towns of Shoumen and Silistra.

Of particular importance for the MRF over the past quarter was the regular session of the party Congress. It is the Congress that struck the balance of the party's participation in the governance of the country for two consecutive terms of office or over the last eight years. And it is the Congress again that also outlined the prospects for the future development of the party and the challenges it is currently facing.

In his address to the Congress, the party Chairman, Ahmed Dogan, said that the project envisaging the development of the MRF did not contain any referral to its consolidation as a leader's party, but – unfortunately – this subsequently turned out to be the actual political fact. He pointed out the need of a reform in the party, because otherwise it could start lagging behind the dynamic development of the general processes, which were taking place in the country. "Bulgaria lacks a functioning civil

society, therefore the transition cannot be said to be completed yet", is what Dogan also pointed out in his report before the Congress. In his opinion, "according to all commonly accepted political criteria, the Cabinet of Sergei Stanishev is a successful one, and as far as the economic indicators are concerned, it is the most effective government of the Bulgarian transition". According to Dogan, Bulgaria is lacking a national vision both with respect to its overall development as a country and its place within the European Union, and this is a major problem hampering its future development at large.

In his speech, Dogan also touched upon the issue of Turkey's EU membership. In his opinion, "the road of the European Union towards itself and the global world goes by large through the Dardanelles and Chanakkale. Because it is in Chanakkale and the Dardanelles that the new historical matrix of the new tolerance and the new European identity has been laid down – this is the philosophy of synthesis of both values and cultures. It is here that the outcome and key to the salvation of the new global and multi-cultural world has been hidden".

Despite Dogan's yet another declaration that he intended to withdraw from his post in the near future, he was unanimously re-elected leader of the party by the delegates to the Congress by means of an open hand-raising voting procedure.

The MRF won the mayor's seats in several settlements of the country at the local by-elections held at the end of October. Ismail Osman from the MRF is the new mayor of the Rouen Municipality, having won the elections without a run-off at the first leg of the elections with a total of 52.55 per cent of the votes. The MRF also won the mayor's seat in the Stambolovo Municipality, Haskovo District. The MRF candidate, Mandadjid Mandadjid, was elected with 87.8 per cent of the votes. The GERB candidate, Gospodin Gospodinov, remained second with 8.23 per cent of the votes.

2.6. The Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP)

In the last three months of 2009, the BSP failed to produce any clear-cut and meaningful political assessment concerning the reasons underlying the loss of the June 2009 general election. Instead, the internal party in-fighting exacerbated even further and this, in fact, is the major reason for the lack of such a clear-cut analysis and in-depth assessment.

And yet, what could also be observed in the party during the last quarter of 2009 was a period of relative consolidation, especially at the time of the mayor's local by-elections held in the capital city. Initially, the party leader, Sergei Stanishev, did not second the nomination of Georgi Kadiev in the capacity of a candidate for mayor of the Left, because he saw in him a rival for his own leadership post. Subsequently, however, Stanishev came to openly back Kadiev up in the name of the inherent BSP interests.

Despite the fact that Georgi Kadiev and the BSP failed to achieve their major objective, namely to compete with the runner-up at the run-offs of the mayor's by-elections, the outcome for Kadiev at this local by-election exceeded the result scored by the BSP candidate, Brigo Asparukhov, at the previous 2007 regular local elections.

This outcome consolidated Kadiev's positions in the party and he is now turning into a political figure of a nation-wide significance, capable of mobilizing a wider circle of voters by virtue of the purely majority vote ballot procedure. This manner of proceeding according to majority vote approach is entirely in tune with the very understanding Kadiev shares about the development of the BSP. During his election campaign he claimed that the BSP should turn into an all-encompassing party, aspiring to attract a broad circle of voters, not only voters from the socially underprivileged strata of society and the working class.

As a whole, the BSP gave a positive assessment to the outcome from the Sofia mayor's by-elections and declared that the

predictions of all the doomsayers about the early death of the party are premature and totally unsubstantiated.

At the same time, according to its preliminary plan, the BSP held a session of its Party Congress. On a motion tabled by Sergei Stanishev, an election for leader of the party was carried out. Unlike the previous Congress, when Stanishev was elected with nearly 90 per cent of the ballots cast by the delegates, this time his victory was significantly less convincing. The number of delegates who voted in favor of Stanishev was 455, or 54 per cent of the overall number of votes, amounting to 830 in total. The other candidates for the leadership post were: Yanaki Stoilov, Mladen Chervenyakov, and Tatyana Doncheva. It is Doncheva that ranks second in terms of ballots cast – 129 delegates gave their votes for her. The leader of the “Left Wing” within the BSP, Yanaki Stoilov, got the support of 99 delegates, while Chervenyakov got the votes of 78 delegates in total.

Stanishev used some very poignant words while addressing the situation in the party in his speech before the Congress. He criticized the conduct of his party comrades, whose excessive ambitions for the leadership post had dented the image of the party in society rather than improve it. Admitting past mistakes, Stanishev said he regretted that two years ago he failed to release Roumen Ovcharov and Roumen Petkov from the party leadership right after he had released them from their ministerial posts of Minister of Economy and Minister of Interior respectively.

After the Congress, Tatyana Doncheva said that she was ready to set up a new party. In her opinion, the incumbent leadership of the BSP embodied by Sergei Stanishev was leading the party to its total demise, whereas the left-wing voters in the country needed a strong left-wing party. For his part, Roumen Ovcharov declared that Stanishev was merely a caretaker leader of the party.

Tatyana Doncheva's claim for establishing a new left-wing party is looking increas-

ingly more realistic and quite feasible with a view to the resources she avails of – both political and economic. A party established according to her vision would probably be more left-wing oriented than the current orientation of the BSP, and what Doncheva relies on is predominantly social populism.

A re-grouping of forces has been observed after the end of the BSP Congress. Stanishev consolidated his positions at the central leadership, but at the same time has been increasingly losing his legitimacy among the rank-and-file members of the party and its electorate. Signature figures of the BSP, such as Roumen Petkov and Roumen Ovcharov, are no longer members of the Executive Bureau of the party. No longer, however, is member of the Executive Bureau Kiril Dobrev, too, who is considered to belong to the circle close to President Parvanov. Dobrev was one of the faces who was established to have had telephone contacts with the lobbyist from the town of Pleven, Krassimir Georgiev, on account of whom the row in the judiciary broke up.

The last quarter of 2009 saw Sergei Stanishev being stripped from his parliamentary immunity, so that the Prosecutor's Office could hold investigations in connection with the leaks of classified information from the National Security Agency. The occasion for this accusation was a statement made by Alexei Petrov, former official at the National Security Agency, according to whom Stanishev had received a secret report on corruption in the high corridors of power, but failed to return the report to the Security Services.

The Prosecutor's Office also pressed charges against the former Minister of Labor and Social Policy, Emilia Maslarova, for abuses and embezzlement carried out at the ministry she headed. Maslarova gave up her parliamentary immunity herself to the purpose of cooperating with the judicial authorities. She announced that in the course of the investigation it would be proven that she was innocent and all charges against her were unsubstantiated.

The governing majority held a parliamentary vote for the removal of Maslarova from the post of Chairperson of the parliamentary committee on social policy, which she was heading at that time. The BSP opposed this act of the governing majority and in protest withdrew its representatives from the various parliamentary committees. The BSP also addressed the Constitutional Court on account of this particular decision, because – in the opinion of the BSP representatives – it contradicted the Constitution of the country.

Stanishev said that the country was heading towards a form of single-handed governance without any separation of powers whatsoever. In his opinion, Borissov has been exerting unprecedented pressure on the Prosecutor's Office, which might result in political reprisals.

As far as the situation in the country is concerned, the BSP received the support of the Party of European Socialists. PES representatives shared their concern on account of the attitude demonstrated towards the BSP. The reaction of the PES Chairman, Paul Rasmussen, was provoked by a repartee made by Boiko Borissov to the effect that a party such as the BSP, which in the past made recourse to terrorism, should be put under permanent ban rather than take the liberty of criticizing the government.

3. Public Opinion

In the past three months, the confidence rating of the GERB Cabinet retained its high level and the leading figures of this party have come to top all opinion poll ratings in the country. Nonetheless, in comparison with the previous months, a certain decline in this confidence rating has been observed. Most likely this ensues from fact that the GERB Party has begun to experience the sting of its first real-life encounters with the challenges of actual governance.

An opinion poll survey held by the "Mediana" Agency indicates that the new Sofia City Mayor, Yordanka Fandakova, is the politician who has marked the greatest progress

in terms of her personal approval rating on the basis of the responses given by the citizens subject to the opinion poll survey. The positive attitude to Fandakova has grown by 10 per cent and now her approval rating stands at 38 per cent. Whether this high approval rating will be preserved depends on how well she performs in the capacity of a Sofia City Mayor, because the management of the capital city is yet to experience a series of serious tests.

The local by-elections have had a positive impact on the approval rating not only of the GERB winner in the race for the seat of Sofia City Mayor, but on the approval rating of her opponent from the BSP. Georgi Kadiev has marked an 8 per cent increase of his approval rating, which now stands at 19 per cent altogether, which is the same as the percentage of the approval rating, which the leader of his party, Sergei Stanishev, is currently enjoying.

The top rating of the best politicians looks unchanged: first comes the Prime Minister, followed by the President. Boiko Borissov, however, lost 7 per cent of his rating in December and now the people's confidence he enjoys stands at 65 per cent. The decline is sizable but easy to explain, because the wave of approval after the general election has started to subside and is getting gradually replaced by the challenges of real politics. The decline is much more tangible with respect to the two deputy prime ministers in the Cabinet, i.e. Tsvetan Tsvetanov, where the decline is by 4 percent in comparison with November and now stands at 43 per cent, and Simeon Dyankov, where the decline amounts to 9 per cent and his rating now stands at 21 per cent, which can be qualified as a substantial drop of the rating he previously enjoyed. Apart from the objective factors, such as the restrictions characteristic of a time of crisis, Dyankov's shrinking rating is connected to a large extent with some of his hasty statements, which were met with a widely ranging disapproval.

The largest loss of confidence has been observed with respect to the OJ

leader, Yane Yanev. In comparison with November, Yanev lost 13 per cent of his rating in December and now it stands at 21 per cent only.

The leader of the "Attack" Party, Volen Siderov, also lost 5 per cent of the confidence he previously enjoyed, and now his confidence rating stands at 20 per cent.

Despite the fact that the GERB government enjoys a high degree of confidence, the assessments about the performance of Borissov's Cabinet are more or less contradictory. A survey held by the Alpha Research Agency indicates the following: 55 per cent of the Bulgarian citizens share the conviction that the government has been doing things, which are both genuine and specific, connected with the improvement of the situation in Bulgaria. On the other hand, 44 per cent of the respondents think that Borissov's Cabinet is merely promising to do certain things, but no actual work has been done for the promises to come true. The Alpha Research survey also indicates that 71 per cent of the respondents share the opinion that genuine reforms must be carried out in order to bring about a rise in the standard of living. And this is precisely what the priority of the GERB government should be, according to the majority of the citizens of the country. On the whole, the voters are inclined to be skeptical as regards the possibility for curbing the levels of corruption in the country, and a mere 15 per cent of them think that combating corruption will yield positive results in the foreseeable future.

As far as the performance of the police forces is concerned, only 11 per cent of the respondents claim that they feel more secure and better protected after the new government took the reins of power in the country.

4. Major Conclusions and Forecasts

1. The GERB Party has consolidated its political domination on the electoral field, and a proof to this effect is the outcome of the local by-elections for the mayor seats

in a number of settlements throughout the country. Especially important for the GERB Party were the elections held in the capital city, Sofia, where the landslide election result gave additional political self-confidence to the winning GERB Party, although the outcome from these elections was no secret to anyone well in advance.

Despite GERB's second electoral success this year, though, the past quarter saw some slump in the level of confidence the government enjoys, especially on account of its actual performance. The underlying reasons for the declining confidence are connected with its governance practices and the deepening economic crisis throughout the country. This is the reason why the major challenge which GERB will be facing over the coming months, is the party's capacity to curb the consequences of the economic crisis and mitigate its effect on the ordinary citizens mostly.

For the time being, the GERB Party is enjoying a comfortable majority at the Bulgarian Parliament. But given the fact that the economic crisis could deepen even further, the future might see some shifts in the political layers and a possible re-orientation in the attitudes of the parliamentary represented political forces.

The increasingly closer rapprochement between GERB and the "Attack" Party could bring about adverse consequences for the GERB Party from the point of view of its international political relations.

2. The Blue Coalition, which at the beginning of the GERB term of office was a critic of the government in certain areas, now has been lending the governing majority its increasingly stronger support. The relations between GERB and the Blue Coalition are entering a new stage of closer cooperation and political bonding. The appointment of Konstantin Dimitrov from DSB to the post of Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs indicates that the Blue Coalition is getting an increasingly more tangible foothold in the governance of the country. This trend is likely to continue, especially given the fact that the OLI party has now

withdrawn its support for the GERB government. Other such appointments are likely to happen in the future and this will again confirm the trend towards a closer cooperation mentioned above.

The relations between the two major constituent parties of the Blue Coalition – the UDF and DSB – have not marked any substantial changes. The Blue Coalition parties observe and adhere to the coalition agreement signed between them, but at the same time each one of them is pursuing its own strategy as well.

Having won the primaries, held for the election of a UDF leader, as early as the first leg of this election, Martin Dimitrov consolidated his internal party positions as well as the coalition line he has been pursuing with respect to his relations with DSB. In this way, the internal party opposition embodied by the Sofia City UDF organization failed to materialize its long-sought objectives connected with the intention to change the course of the party, which its leader has been pursuing over the past year.

What can be observed in connection with DSB is Ivan Kostov's increasingly growing impact and grip on the party. Being an experienced politician, Kostov is well aware of the weight his party has in the current composition of the National Assembly and is trying to maneuver between the clearly declared support for the GERB Party in key areas of the country's governance, on the one hand, and the attempts to emancipate his party from the dependence on GERB, in order to avoid the potential loss of his party's distinct political stature, on the other.

3. The "Attack" Party turned into the major supporter of both GERB and the government of Boiko Borissov. The relations between these two parties are becoming increasingly closer, although Borissov gave up the idea of holding a referendum for taking down the news in Turkish from the air of the National Television.

Volen Siderov's idea about holding such a referendum, concerning the Turkish language news broadcast by the Bulgarian

National Television, has an ulterior motive as well. It actually aims at solving certain internal party contradictions. The growing discontent of a number of local structures of the "Attack" Party with respect to the policy pursued by Volen Siderov is becoming an increasingly stronger threat for the party unity. The rising danger of the political effacement of the "Attack" Party as a consequence of its support for the GERB governing majority, without any actual participation in the governance of the country, is compelling Siderov to look for the materialization of his pre-election promises in order to make his support for the GERB government and Borissov's Cabinet in particular legitimate in the eyes of the "Attack" members and electorate.

4. The disintegration of the parliamentary faction of the OLI will have an adverse impact on the further development of this party. The resources of power, which thus far the party availed of through its representatives in key parliamentary committees and is now stripped from, deprive this political formation of access to wider publicity, whereby it could acquaint its supporters with its actions and decisions. The limitation of this access can bring about a declining level of public attention to the OLI Party and its activities at large.

Therefore, what is expected from the OLI in the future is an enhancement of its radical rhetoric. Another expectation concerning this party is for it to become an opposition to the incumbent governing majority. Indicative in this respect are the actions of Yane Yanev and his criticism addressed both to Prime Minister Borissov, whom the OLI publicly accused of having contributed to the disintegration of its parliamentary faction, and to Volen Siderov and his "Attack" Party, whose idea for holding a referendum on the Turkish language newscasts on the air of the BNT has been vehemently opposed by the OLI.

What can also be expected in the foreseeable future is for Yane Yanev to raise once again his idea about dissolving the incumbent 41st National Assembly in order

to summon a Grand National Assembly, which will be entrusted with the task of passing a new Constitution of the country. This idea will underlie the future political acts of the party and will result in its enhanced political rhetoric, which thus far has been effective and has worked well for the image of the OLI.

5. After the BSP Congress, at which Sergei Stanishev was re-elected leader of the party, the situation of internal party differences and conflicts has begun to deepen. Despite the fact that Stanishev got re-elected, his legitimacy and the confidence he enjoys among the grass-root electorate and the party membership have been increasingly declining. Circles within the party – around Roumen Petkov, Roumen Ovcharov, and Tatyana Doncheva in particular, are pursuing different strategies for regaining their impact both within the party and in politics at large. Given this situation, Tatyana Doncheva's claims for establishing a new left-wing party are beginning to look increasingly more realistic.

For his part, President Parvanov has also indicated a possibility for a party or a cause to get his personal support after the completion of his second presidential term of office. Parvanov categorically declared that he had no intention of returning to the BSP. All this shows that the left-wing political environment is in a state of restructuring, which will actually take place by the time the next elections are held – both presidential and local.

The outcome for the BSP from the local by-elections for the mayor's seat in the capital city has additionally consolidated the authority of Georgi Kadiev. Although he publicly declared that at the time being he did not intend to compete for the leadership post in the party, in the foreseeable future he will be Sergei Stanishev's major rival. The fact that Roumen Ovcharov and the largest BSP organization in the country – that of the capital city – have been tacitly backing up Kadiev gives additional arguments in favor of the plausible hypothesis about the future role, which Kadiev will have to play.

6. Over the past few months the MRF had relapsed into a total political isolation. Ahmed Dogan, who was unanimously re-elected leader of the party at the latest party Congress, held in the month of December, declared that not before long he would be giving up his leadership post. Most probably this statement is a strategic move on the part of Dogan, helping him consolidate his political control over the party and block the circles of influence emerging around Emel Etem, on the one hand, and around Kamen Kostadinov and Dilyan Peevsky, on the other.

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