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## Political Parties Development in Bulgaria

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■ The political situation over the past three months has been especially dynamic and packed with events, which exacerbated the public opinion in the country. The specific occasion setting most of these events in motion were the controversial Amendment Bills to two Parliamentary Acts, namely the Judiciary Act and the Forests Act, tabled by the governing majority.

President Rossen Plevneliev imposed his veto powers on the text from the amended Judiciary Act envisaging that the members of the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) shall be granted so-called career bonuses after the expiration of their respective terms of office. The President declared his stance in favor of public, widely discussed, and transparent nominations for the members of the future SJC. President Plevneliev imposed his veto powers on the amendments to the Forests Act as well.

■ The leadership of the GERB Party declared that by the end of its current term of office its priority would be the elaboration of the Bulgaria-2020 Agenda. The governing party announced that the emphasis would be laid on establishing job creation mechanisms in support of small- and medium-size enterprises (SMEs). This is one of the sectors in the economy, in connection with which the government has been criticized by its political opponents more often than not.

■ On May 15th, the National Council of the UDF turned down the motion tabled by the party leader, Martin Dimitrov, for renewing the coalition agreement and running elections jointly with DSB and this act actually put an end to the existence of the Blue Coalition. Nadejda Neinksy, an incumbent MEP, said that the outcome of the vote held by the UDF NC was disappointing and proved to be a pitiful attempt to replace the traditional Right Wing.

■ The victory of Sergei Stanishev at the BSP Congress showed that the party stood behind him and that it will be running next year's general election united. Georgi Parvanov lapsed into isolation and is hardly likely to regain his previous positions within the BSP. Stanishev managed to impose the election of loyal people close to him to the new political leadership of the party.

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## 1. The Political and Economic Situation

The political situation over the second quarter of 2012 has been especially dynamic and packed with events, which exacerbated the public opinion in this country. What mostly set all these events in motion were the controversial Amendment Bills to two Parliamentary Acts, namely the Judiciary Act and the Forests Act, which the governing majority tabled and the Bulgarian National Assembly eventually passed.

Although the amendments tabled by the governing party were controversial, opposition parties such as the BSP and the MRF voted in support to some of them. Among the contested amendments is the possibility for starting the election procedure for a new Prosecutor General 6 months before the term of office of the incumbent Prosecutor General has elapsed. This amendment opens the doors for the current and Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) to elect the new Prosecutor General of the Republic. Another amendment is connected with the possibility for the members of the Supreme Judicial Council to be appointed to a higher ranking office in the judiciary after the expiration of their respective terms of office at the SJC. The idea underlying this amendment is to motivate younger professional magistrates to aspire for the office of SJC members. The amendments to the Judiciary Act, however, failed to introduce a direct SJC election mechanism for the judiciary quota as the European Commission had insisted. Nonetheless, the election ratio of delegates to the election body was amended and from now on 5 magistrates will be electing 1 delegate instead of the previous ratio of 10:1, whereby 10 magistrates were electing 1 delegate.

A number of non-governmental organizations expressed criticism with respect to the new amendments to the Judiciary Act.

President Rossen Plevneliev imposed his veto powers on several texts from the amended Judiciary Act envisaging that the members of the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) shall be granted so-called career bonuses after the expiration of their respective terms of office. The President declared his stance in favor of public, broadly discussed, and transparent nominations for the members of the future SJC. Peresident Plevneliev also took the categorical stance that the new Prosecutor General should be elected by the new Supreme Judicial Council.

President Plevneliev imposed his veto powers on the amendments to the Forests Act as well. These amendments make it possible to get construction permit for the right to build on lands located in forest real estate without changing the designation of the territory earmarked for the construction of ski runs, poles for ski lifts and tows, or poles intended for other transport facilities. The amendments also envisage the possibility for private entities to institute the right to use existing ski runs, whereby such an application shall be filed directly with the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry. The right to build ski runs, ski lift and tow stations, lift poles, etc. shall be instituted for an up to 30 years' period of time. After this period of time has expired, the constructed facilities shall become state or municipal property for free. The amendments also envisage that such construction projects can be built on the basis of public-private partnership agreements under terms and conditions provided for by this Act. The amendments to the Forests Act passed by virtue of the votes of the GERB Party parliamentary faction and four independent MPs.

The BSP and the Blue Coalition qualified the amended Forests Act as a lobbyist and anti-constitutional Act and appealed to President Plevneliev to impose his veto accord-

ingly. In the opinion of the co-Chair of the Blue Coalition, Martin Dimitrov, the amended parliamentary act makes it possible for certain investors close to the governing majority to be granted the concession for building and using state-owned territories.

Environmentalists and young people organized protest rallies in Sofia and blocked the busiest boulevard of the capital city. A counter-protest rally was organized by proponents of the idea favoring the development of ski tourism who blocked the international highway to Greece. GERB Party MPs and GERB affiliated regional governors actively participated in the counter-protest marches.

In the wake of the presidential veto on the Forests Act amendments, Prime Minister Borissov declared that new amendments to this Act would be tabled and they would be put to the parliamentary vote only after a consensus had been achieved between the environmentalists and the proponents of the vetoed amendments who uphold the idea of further and larger scale development of the tourist industry. After several days of discussions between the opponents and proponents of the vetoed amendments agreement was reached on only some of the texts of the contested Bill.

At the beginning of June, the National Assembly ratified the agreements between Bulgaria and three banks – BNP Paribas, HSBC, and Raiffeisenbank – for the issuance of government bonds to the amount of EUR 950 million. The purpose of this issue is to refinance the debt contracted by Milen Velchev, Minister of Finance from Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha's government (2001 – 2005). The Bank of New York will be the institution, which will effect the placement transactions of the new Bulgarian sovereign debt. The contractual arrangements envisage an interest cap of 10 percent for the new Euro-bond

issue. According to the Minister of Finance, Simeon Dyankov, the monthly amount of interest repayments on the new government bond issue would be within the range of BGN 8 to 12 million, while the actual interest level at which the issue will be placed would be around 5 percent. In Dyankov's opinion, this yield level is the best possible option for the repayment of the debt inherited from Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha's government. Dyankov also thinks that given the current circumstances the best move for the government is the option of raising a loan on the international market. The Bulgarian National Bank approved the Government Debt Issue Bill tabled by the Ministry of Finance and the Governor of the BNB, Ivan Iskrov, confirmed that this was a step in the right direction.

The Blue Coalition voted in support to the ratification of the international agreements providing for the issue of government bonds intended raise the new EUR 950 million Bulgarian sovereign debt.

For its part, the BSP addressed its sharp criticism against the draft agreement for the new debt issue. According to MP Roumen Ovcharov, the envisaged interest cap of 10 percent is a mistake. He is of the opinion that this debt issue had to be launched two years ago when the country availed of a fiscal reserve amounting to about BGN 8 billion and the investors' attitude to taking such a debt would have been much more favorable. Ovcharov reminded his fellow MPs of the ongoing crisis situation with the government debts of Greece, Spain, and Italy, which would adversely impact the newly issued Bulgarian debt.

The apprehensions of the BSP representatives, however, were refuted. On July 3<sup>d</sup>, the new Euro-bond issue was placed at an interest rate yield of 4.5 percent. Paying a visit to Germany, President Plevneliev said that the

interest rate offered by the investors was a proof of their confidence in the stability of the Bulgarian economy. It is worth noting that investor interest in this issue amounted to almost EUR 5 billion.

According to data of the Ministry of Finance, the balance of the May 2012 government budget is in a positive territory and stands at BGN 284 billion, whereas the budget expenditures have risen by 3.3 percent. Thus the republican budget has formed a surplus to the tune of BGN 334.5 million and a European funds deficit to the tune of BGN 267 million at the same time. In comparison with the January – May 2012 period, the budget position has improved by BGN 665 million (which makes 0.8 percent of the GDP). What contributes to this result is the improved balance of the republican budget by BGN 802.5 million (or 1 percent of the GDP), while the European funds deficit has risen by BGN 137.6 (or 0.2 percent of the GDP). The fiscal reserve as of May 31<sup>st</sup> 2012 stands at BGN 5 billion compared to its amount of BGN 4.9 billion at the end of April.

According to an analysis made by UniCredit Bank on the economic situation in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, inflation in Bulgaria at the end of the current year will reach 2.9 percent, and the average inflation rate throughout the whole of 2012 will amount to 2.2 percent. The analysis also gives a forecast figure for the 2013 average inflation rate, which will reach 2.5 percent.

As previously announced, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July, Meglena Kuneva, ex-European Commissioner and 2011 presidential candidate, set up a new political party under the name of Bulgaria of the Citizens, identical with the name of the Movement, which Kuneva initiated in December 2011 after her loss at the presidential election. The Movement will continue to function alongside with the new party.

The founders of the Bulgaria of the Citizens Party adopted the Statute of the party and elected Meglena Kuneva Chairperson of the new political formation. She was the only nominee of the Initiative Committee for the leadership post. Among the founders of the new party are: the ex-Minister of Education in the tri-partite coalition government representing the NMSII Party, Daniel Valchev; the former DSB activists who publicly resigned from Ivan Kostov's party: Proshko Proshkov, Christo Anguelichin, and Peter Nickolov; attorney-at-law Yonko Grozev; Peter Stoyanovich, former member of the faded Georgyovden Movement; volleyball player Plamen Konstantinov, etc. The number of founders attending the Constituent Assembly was close to 1000 people. The majority of the attendees refuted the idea about positioning the new political formation as a right-centrist party and self-determined themselves as members of a democratic right-wing party.

The Constituent Declaration of the new party points out that 5 years after Bulgaria's accession to the European Union, the country looks increasingly less like a European state, the economy is monopolized by people close to the governing circles, while small and medium business has been put down on its knees.

In her address to the Constituent Assembly Meglena Kuneva qualified the new party as "the Right Wing beyond the transition". For a yet another time she differentiated herself from the current political system by comparing it with a political cartel, whereby everyone is in office in one or another way. She declared that the new party had the ambition to govern the country on its own and turn Bulgaria into a modern state of free people. She added that the party's objective was not to "co-participate" in the country's governance in the capacity of a coalition partner, but to govern in favor of the people instead.

In the days following the Constituent Assembly, Kuneva tabled her first motions in the capacity of party leader concerning the composition of the party leadership, namely the National Council (NC) and the Control Council (CC) of the new party. Thus, among the members elected to the NC are: Daniel Valchev, the former UDF top activist Naiden Zelenogorsky, Daniel Mittov, Proshko Proshkov, Christo Anguelichin, Yonko Grozev, journalist Toma Bickov, publisher Vesselin Todorov, etc. The Control Council of the party consists of 7 members.

In the quarter under review, the notorious Anguel Christov and Plamen Galev, better known as "the Galev brothers", received guilty verdicts from the highest instance law-court. However, they escaped from justice and at the time being their whereabouts are unknown. An international police order for their search and detention has been issued to this effect.

The Prosecutor's Office brought up charges against the owners of the "Bulgaria Media Group" – Lyubomir Pavlov and Ognyan Donev. The two of them own the most widely read newspapers in country, namely the Trud Daily and the 24 Hours Daily. Pavlov was charged on three counts – documentary fraud, money laundering, and false documentation. Ognyan Donev, CEO of the Sopharma Pharmaceutical Company, was charged with the crime of money laundering. The remand measure imposed on the two of them was bail to the tune of BGN 50,000. The charges against Pavlov and Donev were brought up following signals filed in by their business partners Christo Grozev and Carl von Habsburg concerning certain financial transactions carried out by Pavlov and Donev through a number of offshore companies. The signals claim that with the money laundered in this way Pavlov and Donev have funded the purchase of the media group. Habsburg and Grozev also filed

signals about the take-over of the publications of "Bulgaria Media Group" perpetrated by Pavlov and Donev. A temporary distraint warrant was even levied on the property of the two dailies in connection with the complaints of Habsburg and Grozev.

Strong public reverberations were provoked by the criminal charges brought up against the well-known businessman Grisha Ganchev, owner of the Litex Commerce Group, by the Specialized Prosecutor's Office. He was accused of being a leader of an organized crime group set up to the purpose of perpetrating crimes against the taxation system and was also charged with directing a threat for committing murder. According to the evidence collected thus far, it was Grisha Ganchev who headed the criminal structure, participants in which were six people, including his son Danail Ganchev, all of whom were detained on May 11<sup>th</sup> 2012. The threat for committing murder, which Grisha Ganchev was accused of, is said to have been addressed at Krassimir Stefanov, Director of the National Revenue Agency. The remand measure imposed on Grisha Ganchev was bail to the tune of BGN 500,000. The charges brought up against his son were for participation and organization of a criminal group and his remand measure ruled by the law-court was detention on the motive that there was a danger for him to commit another crime as well.

Two of the indicative lawsuits monitored by the European Commission came to a close during the quarter under review. The Sofia District Court acquitted Krassimir Georgiev, better known under the nick-name of Krassyo the Black, from the charge of having committed perjury. According to the court panel, the act he was accused of cannot be subject to trial, because when he was giving testimony about his possible acquaintance with magistrates he was acting in the capacity of a witness in a law-

suit for undue trading in influence. Before this not-guilty verdict, the Sofia Regional Court had found Krassimir Georgiev guilty and had given him a two years' probation sentence.

The Sofia Appellate Court acquitted Maria Mourgina in a lawsuit trying her for misappropriation and abuse in her then capacity of Director of the National Revenue Agency (NRA). She was charged with abuse of office and filing in a tax return containing false information. She was also handed an arraignment accusing her of having addressed threats at the then Director of the Silistra NRA Territorial Directorate, Milena Tzolchovska, and having tried to make Tzolchovska hand in her resignation from the post. On January 25<sup>th</sup> 2012, the Sofia District Court sentenced Mourgina to 4 years in prison having found her guilty on two of the four indictments concerning various counts of abuse of office, which also included the accusation of her issuing illegitimate instructions to modify a tax assessment act of a company domiciled in Pleven, thus incurring damages to the tune of BGN 1.3 million to the government budget. Her attorneys, however, filed in an appeal before a higher-instance court, namely the Sofia Appellate Court, the ruling of which was acquittal.

Over the past quarter, the relations between Bulgaria and Macedonia grew rather tense. The underlying cause for this tension is rooted in several events, two of which are of greater importance.

First, on May 4<sup>th</sup>, the Bulgarian Ambassador to Macedonia was prevented from laying flowers on the grave of the Bulgarian revolutionary Gotze Delchev on the day of the anniversary of his heroic death, because of the hostile behavior of a group of young people. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent a protest note to this effect and President Rossen Plevneliev qualified the occurrence as inadmissible. The Head of State declared that Bulgaria

welcomes and supports the accession of each European country to the EU family and that the Bulgarian state will work for the accession of Macedonia to the Union, but for their part the Macedonian people and politicians have to respect history and their neighbors.

Second, the Spaska Mitrova case made it to the top of the agenda once again when the Supreme Court in Macedonia awarded the parental rights to her daughter to Mitrova's husband. Before the final ruling, several law-court instances had ruled the case in favor of Spaska Mitrova. Throughout the lengthy law-court saga, the entire Bulgarian public opinion rose in her support.

Prime Minister Borissov said that Bulgaria had no intention of commenting the court ruling on Spaska Mitrova's case but added that Bulgaria would be very strict when the criteria for Macedonia's accession to the EU become subject to discussion. In Borissov's opinion, "it is then that we shall judge them" in compliance with "European criteria" and we shall say what kind of democracy this country has, how independent their judicial system is and how they cope with the combat against organized crime.

At the European Council Summit held on June 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>, the Euro-zone leaders agreed on important short-term measures to ensure the stability of the Euro area. In the presence of the President of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy they discussed the development of a specific and time-bound road map for the achievement of a genuine Economic and Monetary Union. After the discussions, the Bulgarian Prime Minister, Boiko Borissov, said that for the time being it was not necessary to deepen the political integration in the European Union any further. In his opinion, no country was ready for such a move as yet. Nonetheless, he said he support-

ed Herman Van Rompuy and his plan for the future of the Economic and Monetary Union geared to more integration and control within the framework of the European Union, and transferring more powers to Brussels.

## **2. State and Development of the Party System**

### **2.1 Trends within the Right-Wing**

#### ***Political Environment***

##### **2.1.1 Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (The GERB Party)**

The leadership of the GERB Party declared that its priority till the end of its term of office will be the drafting of the strategic Bulgaria 2020 Agenda. The governing majority said that they would lay the emphasis on elaborating mechanisms for job creation in support of small and medium business. This is one of the sectors of the economy, which has been receiving the most vehement criticism on the part of the opposition.

Another commitment, which the GERB Party declared, was further work on the e-government project. This project is a priority upheld by President Plevneliev as well.

The construction of motorways continues to rank among the priorities, on which the GERB governing majority has been working most actively since the time it came in office. Within the context of the election campaign leading to next year's general election, work on this priority will most probably be even accelerated.

Over the past three months, the GERB Party sustained some heavy criticism on the part of the opposition to the effect that its parliamentary majority passes lobbyist parliamentary acts in favor of certain business circles. Thus for instance, the opposition accused the governing majority of amending the Forests

Act in favor of companies with marked interests in the domain of ski-tourism. The mass protests of civic and environmentalist organizations made the governing party reconsider its stance. As soon as the presidential veto was issued, Prime Minister Borissov declared that the Forests Act Amendment Bill would not be put to the vote in the Plenary Hall of the National Assembly before the environmentalists and the proponents of ski-tourism development have reached a consensus. The two sides held several days' long discussions, but as far as some of the texts are concerned such a consensus was not arrived at. Finally, the parliamentary committee on agriculture and forests adopted only those texts of the Amendment Bill where mutual agreement had indeed been reached.

The GERB Party announced that by September at the latest they would draft amendments to the Electoral Code and put them up for a broad public discussion. One of the amendments envisages the requirement for submitting declarations for the origin of funds donated to parties, which exceed the amount of one minimum salary for the country. What is currently required is that only donations exceeding BGN 1000 need to be declared. The Chairperson of the legal parliamentary committee, Iskra Fidossova, pointed out that these amendments to the Electoral Code were made in compliance with the recommendations of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and that they also envisage the obligation for all media to publish information on their websites about the party or parties they have signed contracts with. An amendment to the Penal Code is also envisaged, which will allow to use special intelligence devices for the investigation of the notorious "vote purchasing". The permission for such use, however, will be granted by the Prosecutor's Office only.

### 2.1.2 The Blue Coalition (the Union of Democratic Forces - UDF and Democrats for Strong Bulgaria - DSB)

On May 15<sup>th</sup>, the National Council of the UDF refused to accept the agreement tabled by the party leader, Martin Dimitrov, for the continuation of the coalition format and the joint running of elections with DSB. This in practice put an end to the Blue Coalition. The adversaries to the union with DSB gained the upper hand with 49 votes against 38, while 5 delegates to the NC abstained. Right after the vote, Martin Dimitrov handed in his resignation from the post of UDF leader.

Some of the major factors contributing to the disintegration of the Blue Coalition were the representatives of UDF-Sofia, UDF-Plovdiv, UDF-Bourgas, and the Chairman of the UDF Election Headquarters, Boris Markov. Before the beginning of the NC session, the Sofia City UDF organization voted against the existence of the Blue Coalition, qualifying it as a formula of "fear and hypocrisy".

Right after the end of the UDF NC session, Martin Dimitrov shared with journalists that it was Ivan Kostov who actually had to hand in his resignation in order to preserve the integrity of the Blue Coalition. According to Martin Dimitrov, the vote at the UDF NC session was against the DSB leader precisely, rather than against the joint actions of the UDF with Kostov's party.

Nadejda Neinsky who was elected MEP on the joint party slate of the Blue Coalition said that the outcome of UDF NC vote was a disappointment and much resembled an attempt at replacing the traditional Right Wing. In her opinion, what gained the upper hand in the UDF were the interests that brought about the failure of the party at the 2011 presidential election. The people defending this stance actually served the interests of other political

parties and politicians that were far from being part and parcel of the reformist policy Bulgaria was pursuing.

The ex-Mayor of the town of Pleven, Naiden Zelenogorsky, expressed his disappointment with the decision made by the UDF National Council. In his opinion, this move makes the representation of the right-wing voters at the next Bulgarian Parliament utterly questionable. He also qualified the Blue Coalition as a successful project, which had to continue its existence. At the end of June, Zelenogorsky left the UDF with the surprising announcement that he was joining Meglena Kuneva's political project.

As soon as the decision made by the UDF became public, the National Leadership of DSB held an ad-hoc session and came up with a declaration expressing regret about the decision of their coalition partners. DSB also announced that the party was starting preparations for running the next general election on its own. This was the opinion around which the municipal chairpersons of the party had united. The final decision to this effect was made by the DSB National Assembly, the session of which was held on June 30<sup>th</sup>.

After Martin Dimitrov's resignation, the UDF NC elected Boris Markov – one of the initiators of the disintegration of the Blue Coalition and the only nominee – to the post of temporary party leader. Markov was mainly given support by the UDF organizations of Sofia, Plovdiv, and Bourgas. Out of the 69 participants in the UDF NC session, 53 voted in favor of his election. Boris Markov has been entrusted with the task of preparing the UDF for the primaries, at which a new leader will have to be elected. The primaries are scheduled to take place on July 8<sup>th</sup>, and the possible run-off will be held on July 15<sup>th</sup>.

Boris Markov declared that the UDF will not enter into coalition with DSB at the forthcoming general election. He qualified as speculations the claims that the UDF was holding negotiations with other political formations – such as NMSP for instance – for joint running the general election. He also said that the UDF MPs elected on the Blue Coalition party slate will continue to be part and parcel of the parliamentary faction of the Blue Coalition.

The Chief Secretary of the UDF, Dimitar Ivanov, also handed in his resignation. His motives to resign are rooted in the disappointment with the UDF withdrawal from the Blue Coalition. Konstantin Arabadjiev, who thus far had been Secretary of the Primaries Commission, came to replace Ivanov at the post.

The major contenders for the leadership post in the UDF will be Vanyo Sharkov and Emil Kabaivanov. Support for Vanyo Sharkov has expressed Martin Dimitrov, until recently UDF party leader, MEP Nadejda Neinsky, and people close to the previous party leadership. Sharkov is one of the proponents of the Blue Coalition and stands for cooperation with DSB and enlarging the coalition with other like-minded right-wing parties. The UDF is facing two roads ahead, in Vanyo Sharkov's opinion. The first one means non-transparent arrangements agreed in the dark and this was the road that brought about the failure of the party at the 2011 presidential election. The second one summons the party to follow the confidence of its voters and work for the enlargement of the Blue Coalition format.

### 2.1.3. The Attack Party

The expectations that the Attack Party parliamentary faction will disintegrate over the second quarter of 2012 failed to come true. For the time being, Volen Siderov has preserved his control over the Attack parliamen-

tary faction. The fact that Siderov's ex-wife, Kapka Georgieva, and her son, MEP Dimitar Stoyanov, set up a new party did not provoke other Attack MPs to leave the party and its parliamentary faction. For the time being, the new National-Democratic Party (NDP) headed by Dimitar Stoyanov has failed to indicate any significant electoral impact.

The electoral confidence in the Attack Party, however, continues to erode and this is the reason why Siderov is looking for partners in order to run next year's general election. The party continues to put its stakes on the opposition rhetoric and to manifest an extremely critical attitude with respect to the GERB Party.

The Attack Party reacted harshly to the amendment to the Electoral Code tabled by the MRF, the essence of which is that election canvassing can be carried out in a language different from the Bulgarian language. The Attack appealed to all the other parties to oppose such an idea in a most categorical way. The Attack Party leader, Volen Siderov, demanded that the GERB Party should clearly indicate whether they accepted this idea. GERB confirmed its stance that they could not admit such a legislative amendment to pass because it would be anti-constitutional.

Volen Siderov even went as far as to table a motion for launching a subscription at the National Assembly, by which he intended to summon all MPs to counter in a "clear and categorical way the anti-constitutional demand of the MRF for carrying out election propaganda in the Turkish language at the time of the various election campaigns".

What became clear over the past three months was that the close relations between the Attack Party and VMRO-Bulgarian National Movement (VMRO-BNM), led by Krassimir Karachanov, were becoming increasingly more evident. The two parties undertook several joint

actions, which suggests that the cooperation between them will be getting stronger with a view to next year's general election. Thus for instance, in front of the seat of Sofia City Municipality, the two parties organized a joint protest insisting yet again that the sound blasting systems of the Banya Bashi Mosque in the center of the capital city be stopped altogether. The protest was held before the session of the Municipal Council, at which the two parties wanted this issue to be considered. The participants in the protest declared that they had raised a subscription with more than 30,000 signatures of people who stood against the noise, which the external loudspeakers of the mosque made. In their opinion, the Municipality was disregarding Ordinance Number 1, which provides for the order and conditions under which sound systems can be used in public places. Once again they insisted that the Sofia City Mayor, Yordanka Fandakova, should immediately take respective measures to redress the situation.

Volen Siderov qualified the current conduct of the Bulgarian government as "extremely incorrect" with respect to the anti-Bulgarian campaign launched by the Macedonian state. He read a declaration at the National Assembly, signed by both the Attack Party and VMRO-BNM, which appeals to the Bulgarian institutions to take a clearer and more categorical stance concerning the anti-Bulgarian policy pursued by Macedonia for quite some time now.

Another joint declaration issued by the Attack Party and VMRO-BNM contained an unequivocal protest against the organization of a gay parade in the capital city at the end of June. According to the Youth Organization of the Attack Party, this parade would be held in obvious discrepancy with the notions of the Bulgarian state and society concerning family and Christian values.

#### **2.1.4 The Order, Legality and Justice Party (OLJ)**

Over the past quarter, the OLJ was somewhat outside the focus of public attention. The party leader, Yane Yanev, who had always been an especially active player on the political stage, suddenly chose to take the stance of a passive observer. Even on controversial issues, such as the amendments to the Judiciary Act and the Forests Act, he failed to reveal any active interest or voice a political stance. Most likely he will become active again on the eve of next year's general election or even sooner – this coming fall. At the time being, however, his party is having a very weak electoral impact and its chances of making it to the next Parliament independently are negligible. This is the reason why the search for coalition partners will be one of the major goals of the OLJ in the coming autumn months.

#### **2.2. Trends within the Parliamentary Opposition: the Left-Centrist Political Spectrum**

##### **2.2.1. Bulgarian Socialist Party**

The long-awaited clash for the leadership post between the BSP leader, Sergei Stanishev, and ex-President, Georgi Parvanov, failed to materialize altogether. Having become aware that Stanishev is the favorite of the municipal party organizations, Parvanov withdrew from the leadership contest on the very day of the party Congress.

Stanishev received the votes of 77.42 percent of the delegates to the Congress. The other contender for the post, Georgi Kadiev, received 22.58 percent. Maya Manolova was elected Chairperson of the BSP Control Commission. Georgi Parvanov was elected member of the National Council of the party with the votes of 536 delegates to the Congress.

The NC member elected with the largest majority of votes – 552 – was Yanaki Stoilov. Among the other NC members are: Dora Yankova, Anguel Naidenov, Velislava Dareva, Anton Koutev, Milko Bagdassarov, Illiana Yotova, Borislav Goutzanov, Kornelia Ninnova, Christian Vigenin, Georgi Bozhinov, Dimcho Mikhalevsky, Mladen Chervenjakov, etc.

The address of the BSP leader to the Congress contained harsh criticism concerning the conduct and practices of the governing party. Stanishev said that there was no democracy in Bulgaria today and that the country was ruled by the oligarchy. In his opinion, the power in the country is concentrated in the hands of few people and this is what is crushing the modern Bulgarian state. Besides, “each one who dares to speak up can feel the pressure of the entire state machine on his or her own back”.

Stanishev was also highly critical with respect to the social and economic situation in the country. Among the facts he pointed out in support of his criticism concerning the grim situation in the social and economic sectors are the statistical data indicating that about 600,000 Bulgarians are jobless and that youth unemployment has exceeded 30 percent.

From the congress rostrum, Stanishev appealed to all BSP members to focus their efforts on the two party campaigns – collecting signatures for the subscription demanding that a national referendum on the fate of the Belene NPP be summoned and the subscription demanding that youth unemployment be curbed.

In his congress speech, Georgi Parvanov said that the BSP was losing the leadership contest with the GERB Party and that the major reason underlying this fact was the loss the BSP sustained at the 2011 presidential and local elections. Parvanov accused Stanishev of pursuing the wrong policy and reproached him of “choking the party and failing to pro-

duce any added value to the results of the BSP and the confidence people have in it for several years in a row”. With respect to the party’s coalition policy Parvanov said that the BSP had never been as isolated as that. In his opinion, what the party needed was a strong coalition of a new quality. The strength of a coalition – in his opinion – is not the sum of its constituent parts, but rather the might and power it radiates.

Parvanov also reproached the BSP leadership of having belatedly reacted to the subscription demanding a national referendum on the fate of the Belene NPP. In his opinion, the BSP has also missed the appropriate moment to become the center, which attracts the discontented, the poor, the dissenters, and all those who demand a different government for the country. This – according to him – was the reason why the BSP should adopt the motto “for a new social Bulgaria” and should start investing in the enterprising strata of the population without forgetting the retirees, the poor, and the young.

At the beginning of June, the BSP National Council endorsed the composition of the new Executive Bureau of the party as tabled by the BSP leader, Sergei Stanishev. Thus, the new BSP leadership consists of 23 members. Among them are the four deputy chairpersons: Yanaki Stoilov, Georgi Pirinsky, Evgeniy Ouzounov, and Dimitar Dubbov; the six secretaries: Anton Koutev, Boiko Vellikov, Katya Nickolova, Krassimir Yankov, Christian Vigenin (Secretary for International Affairs), and Evtim Kostadinov (Treasurer); the spokesperson Anguel Naidenov; and the following members: Anna Yaneva, Borislav Goutzanov, Vladimir Topencharov, Denitza Zlateva, Dora Yankova, Illiana Yotova, Yordan Stoikov, Mikhail Mickov, Lyubomir Petkov, Milko Bagdassarov, Stanislav Vladimirov, and Yavor Gechev.

The National Council of the BSP also endorsed the new composition of the National Election Center, comprising 19 members altogether. Chairman of the Election Center will be Sergei Stanishev himself. The NC plenum made a decision concerning the subscription for a national referendum on the fate of the Belene NPP. In the course of the discussion, discontent was voiced with the rate at which signatures were collected. At the time being, the subscription is short of about 200 thousands signatures in comparison with the legally required number. The BSP intends to close the subscription by July 13<sup>th</sup> – two weeks before the deadline, which falls on July 27<sup>th</sup>. According to the parliamentary Act on the Direct Participation of Citizens in the Governance of the country, such subscriptions shall collect a minimum of 500 thousand signatures over a period of three months, so that the National Assembly can summon a national referendum on the issue subject to the demand for holding such a referendum.

### **2.2.2 Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF)**

Over the last few months, the MRF became markedly more active. Its leader, Ahmed Dogan, said that his party was ready to govern the country. In his opinion, the economic situation in the country was so serious that next year not a single party could prove willing to take the helm of the country's governance and mentioned Greece as a case in point. At a meeting with voters, Ahmed Dogan said that he did not rule out the possibility for the existence of radical attitudes in the country because of the impoverishment of the population and the growing social inequality. At the same time, Dogan does not rule out the possibility for an early general election to be held this fall initiated by the GERB Party, but later on Prime Minister Borissov categorically disproved such an option.

In the course of the past quarter, the MRF renewed its rhetoric about the so-called "Revival Process" (i.e. the replacement of Turkish names by Bulgarian ones), which – in the opinion of representatives of the party – was still continuing today, although in a different guise. Invariably, when the MRF is in opposition, this particular subject matter becomes the foundation for its party propaganda pursued to the purpose of mobilizing its rock-bottom electorate.

At the memorial assembly devoted to the "Revival Process", Ahmed Dogan declared that "the revival process in the Balkans is continuing and will continue in the future as well, but in a much quieter and creeping form". According to him, "there was not a single country in the Balkans, which has not carried out a process of assimilation in one or another form".

The occasion, which prompted the party to revert to this theme, was the decision made by the Plovdiv Municipal Council to rename the Djumaya Square to Roman Stadium Square. The motion to this effect was tabled by the Plovdiv City Mayor, Ivan Tottev, member of the GERB Party, and Kostadin Kisyov, Director of the Archaeological Museum and municipal councilor from political party VMRO-National Ideal for Unity.

At the same time, members of the VMRO Party came up with the initiative to replace the Turkish, Greek, and Arabic names of various localities in the city of Varna as well.

This provoked the acute reaction of the MRF and they read a declaration to this effect at the National Assembly. Lyutvi Mestan qualified the renaming initiatives as a "shortsighted, offensive, and inadmissible political interference in the very nature of language, aimed at the obliteration of the cultural memory, which these toponyms have been carrying throughout the centuries". In Mestan's opin-

ion, this is “a certain form of a new revival process, which this time does not concern the names of people but rather the names of sites and localities; this is a political burglary in the natural territory of language and the effect it produces is to discredit the ethnic tolerance of the multi-cultural society in Bulgaria, which is a member country of the European Union”.

The GERB Party reassured the MRF that they did not back up any of the proposed name-changes.

The MRF municipal election conferences for the respective reporting period started at the end of June. What will be of interest for observers are the municipal conferences in the regions of Kurdjali, Silistra, Bourgas, Targovishte, Shoumen, and Razgrad, with a view to the upcoming next year’s general election.

### 3. Public Opinion

The national representative survey held by the Alpha Research Agency between May 31<sup>st</sup> and June 7<sup>th</sup> among 1025 respondents indicates that the electoral support for the GERB Party gradually continues to shrink.

Numerically, 22.3 percent of the population has expressed readiness to cast their votes for the GERB Party. This is also the percentage of people who are giving their approval for the performance of the government as a whole. The BSP has added another percentage point to its electoral support in comparison with the previous quarter, and at the beginning of June the number of voters who would cast their ballots for this party stands at 18 percent.

The survey also indicates that 5.5 percent of the voters have expressed readiness to vote for Meglena Kuneva’s new party – Bulgaria of the Citizens. This group of respondents is mainly comprised by people who have previously supported NMSP, the GERB Party, and the Blue Co-

alition. The positive attitude to Kuneva herself is much higher and stands at 27 percent.

At the time being, the effect of the split between the UDF and DSB has more or less a negative impact on both parties. The UDF enjoys a slightly higher electoral support – 2.1 percent, while the support for DSB amounts to 1.7 percent. The MRF has preserved its electoral support at around 5 percent. The electoral support for the Attack Party continues to decline and only 1.5 percent of the respondents would vote for the party itself, while the number of respondent who would cast their ballots for its leader, Volen Siderov, stands at 4 percent.

For the same period, the positive assessments for the performance of the government remain unchanged at 22 percent, while the negative assessments have even marked a slight decline – from 36 to 33 percent. Lilliana Pavlova, Minister of Regional Development and Public Works, has marked the highest confidence rating rise over the past three months. Directly opposite are the confidence rating assessments given to ministers Totyo Mladenov, Sileon Dyankov, and Nonna Karadjova.

The assessment given to Prime Minister Boiko Borissov continues to be on the positive side: 36 percent of the respondents approve of his performance, while another 33 percent have given him a negative assessment.

The positive assessments for the performance of President Rossen Plevneliev continue to be more than twice higher than the negative assessments, which in numeric terms is 39 to 15 percent.

The National Assembly continues to be one of the public institutions enjoying the lowest approval rating – as little as 9 percent of the respondents approve of its performance. At the same time, the approval rating of the Speaker of the National Assembly, Tzetzka Tzacheva, stands at 14 percent.

#### 4. Major Conclusions and Forecasts

1. The past quarter confirmed the impression that the election campaign for the 2013 regular general election has begun well ahead of time. The political parties have sharpened their political rhetoric, and the relations between the governing majority and the opposition are yet to become increasingly more uptight.

The right-wing political space is undergoing a process of radical restructuring. A number of the prominent representatives of the traditional anti-communist Right Wing, which is the heir of the early UDF, joined Meglena Kuneva's newly established party – Bulgaria of the Citizens. This will bring about a confrontational election campaign between the political entities in the right-wing environment fighting for the votes of the right-wing electorate. The GERB Party, on one hand, and the UDF and DSB, on the other, see in Meglena Kuneva a rival competing for a share of the right-wing votes.

As far as the governance of the country is concerned, the major challenge the government is facing is the economic situation in the European Union, which is negatively impacting the Bulgarian economy as well. Although this country is among the states enjoying the lowest budget deficit and the lowest level of foreign indebtedness, Bulgaria continues to be the poorest country in the European Union. This enhances social discontent, which will be one of the important factors in the long election campaign.

2. The GERB Party has already started its preparation for next year's general election and is working hard on it. The party has focused its attention on the country's governance. What is very important for the GERB Party is to complete the unfinished infrastructure projects and in all likelihood it

is this precisely that will underlie its election campaign in the attempt to win a second term of office. At this stage, however, the popular confidence in both the party and the government has begun to decline. The opinion poll surveys are indicative in this respect. GERB continues to be the first political force in the country, but governing the country on its own after the 2013 election seems hardly possible, at least for the time being. This raises the issue about the necessity for the party to start looking for coalition partners. Thus far, however, the GERB Party has made no categorical claim as to its possible coalition partners.

3. The prospects, which the UDF and DSB are facing, so far remain unclear. Whether the Blue Coalition will eventually be restored, depends mainly on the outcome of the leadership contest in the UDF. The future fate of the UDF lies in the hands of the 9,000 UDF party members who will vote at the UDF primaries on July 8<sup>th</sup>. Should the winner be Vanyo Sharkov, then efforts will be made by the party to run the next general election jointly with DSB, enlarging at the same time the format of the coalition. Should the contest be won by Emil Kabaivanov, then the UDF will follow the road ahead on its own. The chances of both the UDF and DSB to make it to the next Parliament independently are much slimmer, if they choose to run the 2013 election on their own.

Currently, DSB is preparing to run the election on its own. This party, however, continues to be encapsulated and is incapable of expanding its electoral support. The fact that individual politicians from DSB are joining Meglena Kuneva's party may adversely impact the support for the UDF and DSB, which – even notwithstand-

ing this fact – has been growingly becoming weaker. The possibility for entire local party structures of the traditional Right Wing to join the Bulgaria of the Citizens party, however, cannot be ruled out.

4. The electoral support for the Attack Party continues to dwindle. This made the party leader, Volen Siderov, reconsider his policy and start looking for coalition partners. The initiatives launched jointly with VMRO-Bulgarian National Movement, led by Krassimir Karakachanov, indicates that the two parties will most probably run the 2013 general election together. There is some likelihood for Valeri Simeonov's party – National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria, which is of a regional nature – to join the union of the Attack Party and VMRO-BNM. Although the relations between Volen Siderov and Valeri Simeonov, owner of the SKAT TV, were strongly exacerbated, the common political interests and the potential to jointly make it to the next Parliament may unite them once again.

At the time being, the party set up by Dimitar Styanov, incumbent MEP elected on the party slate of the Attack Party, would hardly prove capable of competing with Volen Siderov's party.

5. The victory of Sergei Stanishev at the BSP party Congress indicated that the party has rallied behind him and that it will run the upcoming general election united. Georgi Parvanov relapsed into isolation and will hardly be able to regain his positions within the BSP to the extent he enjoyed until recently. Roumen Petkov, Kiril Dobrev, and Dragomir Stoinev, who are close to Parvanov's inner circle, also lapsed into isolation. Stanishev imposed his will and the political leadership of the party now consists entirely

of people close to him. Stanishev, however, did not forget to stretch out his hand to the left-wing faction in the party headed by Yanaki Stoilov. In this way, the internal differences within the party have now been smoothed out.

At the time being, the BSP has preserved its electoral positions. The party, however, is proving incapable of properly availing itself of the current social and economic situation in the country by manifesting more convincingly that it is precisely the BSP that is the alternative to the incumbent government.

6. The MRF has started rallying its ranks well ahead of the general election. Next month the party has scheduled to hold the majority of the local MRF election conferences for the respective reporting period, mainly on the level of municipalities. These conferences are important for the party with a view to its preparation for the upcoming general election next year. At the time being, the party looks consolidated. In the autumn, Kassim Dahl will try to intervene in the contest for the MRF electorate with the idea of setting up a new party. The success of this endeavor will be difficult, but the dissipation of a portion of the MRF votes does not seem impossible. MRF representatives have openly declared that such an outcome serves the interests of the GERB Party.

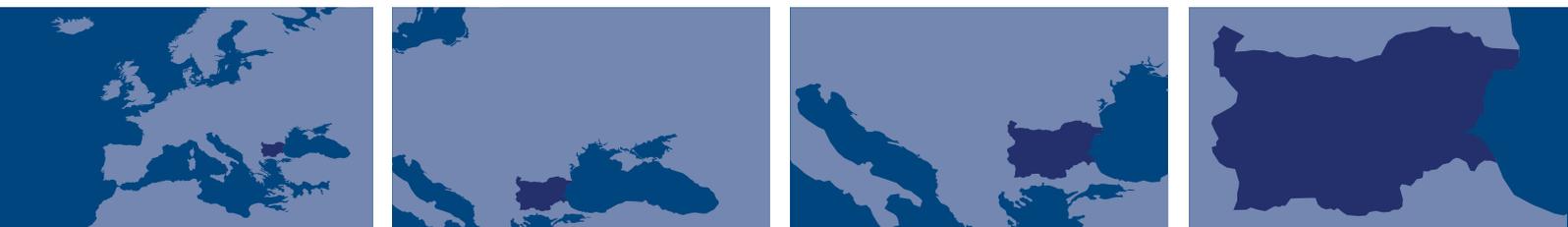
Over the coming months, the MRF is highly likely to employ its 1990s rhetoric about the ethnic peace in the country and the rights and freedoms of the citizens belonging to the country's minorities. This rhetoric, somewhat forgotten during the last 10 years, is on the party's agenda once again from a strategic point of view and aims at consolidating the MRF electorate.

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