

Georgi Karasimeonov (Ed.)

BAR METER

Bulgaria's Political Parties

Year 14, Issue 4, October - December 2014

- Forming a government regularly elected by the National Assembly was an important step in the direction of overcoming the political and parliamentary crisis in this country. Despite the difficulties that the process of composing the government went through, at this stage it will have the necessary parliamentary support for passing the budget for next year and for taking steps for the financial stabilization of the country. These are the urgent measures that the ruling majority has to resolve in the short term.
- The election victory and forming a government led by Boyko Borisov is of paramount importance for the establishment of GERB as a leading political force in the country. Borisov is the first politician to be Prime Minister for a second term since the start of the democratic changes in the country.
- The Reformist Bloc achieved one of their goals – representation in Parliament and participation in the Executive. At the same time, there are still some serious challenges the Bloc is facing related to the assertion of its unity. The controversies between DSB and BCMon convening a congress to elect a party leader are about to undermine the fragile center right coalition. In its turn, this creates a danger for the integrity of the ruling coalition.

**FRIEDRICH
EBERT 
STIFTUNG**

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
Office Bulgaria
Analyses



CONTENTS

1. Political Situation	2
2. State and Development of the Party System	4
2.1. Trends in the parliamentary represented parties supporting the government	4
2.1.1. GERB	4
2.1.2. Reformist Bloc.....	5
2.1.3. Patriotic Front	6
2.1.4. ABV	7
2.2. Trends in the parliamentary opposition	7
2.2.1. BSP.....	7
2.2.2. MRF.....	9
2.2.3. BDC.....	9
2.2.4. "Ataka".....	10
3. Main Conclusions and Forecasts.....	11

1. Political Situation

The political situation after the elections was determined mainly by the negotiations for forming a new government. The presence of 8 political formations in Parliament meant that the winner of the elections GERB was faced with a serious challenge to find a formula for the future government.

GERB appointed a team of negotiators – Tsetska Tsacheva, Rumiana Buchvarova and Menda Stoyanova, who were tasked with negotiating with all parliamentary represented parties for solutions to form a government. At the very beginning GERB announced that they would not enter into a coalition with MRF and “Ataka”. Borisov stated that MRF would be an appropriate partner in the government but it would not be possible to have that, given the circumstances, because “his party would never allow it”. In the process of negotiations Borisov stated several times that the country needed a stable government and that pre-term elections would be detrimental to the state.

The talks with the Reformist Bloc (RB) were difficult and full of controversial signals. At the very beginning of the negotiations DSB leader Radan Kanev stated that the RB would not participate in a government with Boyko Borisov as Prime Minister. This demand blocked the negotiation process between the two formations. Later Radan Kanev announced that the demand was premature and that the two parties should first talk of policies and a common program and then about the people to be part of the government. Borisov said that the most natural thing was for him to be Prime Minister as the leader of the party that won the elections. In that way it would be clear who carried the political responsibility for the government. Borisov stated even that RB were “twisting his arm” and sug-

gested conditions that were not possible to meet, and not in line with the fact that his party had four times higher outcome than the Bloc and that it would bear the main political responsibility of the government.

One of the conditions of RB was to form a government with a limited term of office of two years to carry out the reforms the country needed, and then convene a Grand National Assembly to amend the Constitution. This demand of the reformists was unrealistic because in order to convene a Grand National Assembly, a decision was needed of the current National Assembly passed with a 2/3 majority. In the given fragmentation of the Parliament that would be impossible.

GERB countered the idea of forming a government with a limited term of office announced in advance because it would delegitimize its work from the very beginning. According to GERB the short horizon would only demotivate the administration from doing their job.

The difficulties in forming a GERB government resulted from the fact that a coalition of the minority only with RB was not possible. The MRF stated that they would support such a coalition without taking part in the government, which was not acceptable either for GERB or for the reformists. ABV insisted on a wide coalition between BSP and GERB, for which Parvanov’s party declared support.

GERB made a proposal to BSP for forming a wide coalition. After a tête-a-tête meeting between the leaders of the two parties it was clear that Borisov proposed to Mikov the position of speaker of the National Assembly. Mikov refused the proposition and said that the voters have given BSP the role of the opposition, which the weak election outcome of the left was indicative of. Furthermore, he said that BSP and GERB had some significant program differences

– mainly in the area of tax legislation and social policies, which might lead to controversy and instability of government.

The Patriotic Front turned out to be the key factor in forming a new government. Attracting the PF was a problem, due to some demands the Front had which GERB deemed unacceptable. Being an EPP member GERB was criticized by its European partners, voiced by Joseph Daul during his visit to Bulgaria, who said that a coalition with the PF was unwarrantable due to differences in principles.

After nearly three weeks of efforts a government was formed. GERB and RB signed a coalition Agreement and a Common Program, and the PF signed a Declaration of Support to the Program without taking part in the government. ABV also pledged their support for the government after receiving the position of a Minister and Deputy Prime Minister.

The Coalition Agreement states that GERB and the Reformist Bloc shall unite their efforts to form a pro-European reformist government for a stable development of Bulgaria and for securing a parliamentary majority to support the policies implemented by the government.

The second government with Boyko Borisov as Prime Minister has four Deputy Prime Ministers. Rumiana Buchvarova from GERB is Deputy Prime Minister for coalition policies and state administration. She used to be Chef de Cabinet of Boyko Borisov during his first term of office as PM. DPM for European Affairs and Cooperation and Verification Mechanism is the leader of the Bulgaria for Citizens Movement Meglena Kuneva (Reformist Bloc). GERB's Tomislav Donchev was elected Deputy Prime Minister for Euro-funds and Economy. He was Minister in charge of the Euro-funds in the first GERB government. Ivaylo Kalfin from ABV became Deputy Prime Minister for de-

mographic and social policy and Minister of Labor and Social Policy. Kalfin was a member of the European Parliament from Coalition for Bulgaria, and prior to that Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Cabinet of Sergei Stanishev (2005-2009).

In addition to Meglena Kuneva, the Reformist Bloc is represented in the government by: Bozhidar Lukarski, UDF leader, Minister of Economy; Peter Moskov from DSB, elected Minister of Health; Prof. Todor Tanev – Minister of Education and Science, member of the Civil Board of RB; Nikolai Nenchev – Minister of Defense, Leader of BAPU.

The ministers from the caretaker government of Bliznashki Daniel Mitov and Hristo Ivanov were also elected from the RB quota. They keep their positions of Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Justice, respectively.

The other ministers are representatives of GERB. Temenuzhka Petkova is Minister of Energy. She is former Head of the National Financial Inspectorate. The new Ministry of Tourism is led by Nikolina Angelkova, who was Minister of Transport in the caretaker government of Bliznashki. Minister of Finance is Vladislav Goranov, Deputy Minister of Finance in the former Cabinet of Borisov. Ivailo Moskovski was elected Minister of Transport, IT and Communications. He had the same position in the former government of GERB. Minister of Agriculture is Desislava Taneva, who is former Chair of the Agricultural Committee at the National Assembly. As was expected, Minister of Regional Development is again Lilyana Pavlova, who had the same position in the first Cabinet of Borisov. Minister of Environment and Water is Ivelina Vassileva, Deputy Minister at the same ministry in the former Cabinet of GERB. Veselin Vuchkov was elected Minister of the Interior. He was Tsvetan Tsvetanov's Deputy during the term

of the previous GERB government. Vezhdi Rashidov is Minister of Culture again. Krasen Kralev is the new Minister of Sport.

One of the first tasks of the National Assembly and the new government was to urgently update the state budget for 2015. The reasons were non-performance of the revenue part of the budget and the need to find funds to resolve the CCB crisis. At the end of November the government submitted the amendment act. It intends an increase of 3 billion BGN in the foreign debt. In addition, State securities will be issued for a further 1.5 billion BGN. According to the Ministry of Finance data, 3 billion BGN is needed for resolving the crisis of the banking system. In this way the budget deficit will reach 3.7% GDP, which means an excessive deficit procedure for this country, according to EU regulations. The BSP and "Ataka" MPs voted against this update and MRF abstained.

One of the topics that determined the political situation in the second half of the year – the crisis with CCB, has finally come to the point of resolution. After having been under special supervision for more than 5 months, an auditor's report was issued that recommended writing off more than 4.5 billion BGN from the bank's capital. This raised the issue yet again about the shortcomings of banking supervision of the Bulgarian National Bank and the question about the Governor of the Central Bank – Ivan Iskrov - resigning was put on the agenda again. After the auditor's report BNB withdrew the license of CCB, and the majority shareholder Tsvetan Vassilev appealed before the Supreme Administrative Court. In this way the insolvency procedure of the bank, which had to be heard at the Sofia City Court, was suspended temporarily. Despite that, the guaranteed deposits of up to 100,000 euro will start to be paid.

2. State and Development of the Party System

2.1. Trends in the parliamentary represented parties supporting the government

2.1.1. GERB

After the elections GERB and their leader Boyko Borisov demonstrated a change in the political tone and behavior. Borisov showed that he was capable of seeking dialogue, and GERB demonstrated a new type of coalition culture during the consultations they had with the other parliamentary represented political forces. To a great extent this change of behavior was due to the inevitable search for partners for the government.

Borisov nominated for ministers people known from his first government, like Liliana Pavlova, Ivailo Moskovski, Tomislav Donchev, Vladislav Goranov, Vezhdi Rashidov, Rumiana Buchvarova, who was Chief of his political cabinet – personalities who have gathered political and managerial experience over the past several years.

In the coming months the major challenge GERB will be facing will be related to finding the right decisions for overcoming the economic crisis. Reforms in several public sectors are compelling and this can induce discontent among some of the citizens due the unpopular nature of the former. The challenge for GERB will be to what extent they will manage to balance between the interests of the various parties that support the government.

The parliamentary group of GERB comprises 84 MPs. After Boyko Borisov was elected Prime Minister his position of Chairman of the parliamentary group was taken by Tsvetan Tsvetanov. Tsvetanov's deputies in the parliamentary group are Krasimir Velchev and Tsveta Karayancheva. As expected,

Tsetska Tsacheva was elected Speaker of the National Assembly, and GERB's Dimiter Glavchev is one of her Deputy Speakers.

In spite of not being part of the Executive, Tsvetan Tsvetanov retained his position as 'second-in-command' in GERB after Boyko Borisov. Being the Chairman of the parliamentary group he will have ample opportunities to influence not only the MPs, but the party too. Borisov's engagements as Prime Minister most likely will result in him withdrawing from the real party work, which Tsvetanov will mainly be responsible for.

GERB maintained the leadership of key parliamentary committees and allowed the opposition to appoint chairmen of some of them. Thus, for instance, a representative of BSP became head of the Economic Committee, and MRF – of the Social Policies Committee.

After Tomislav Donchev was elected Deputy Prime Minister, his seat in the European Parliament was taken by Andrey Novakov, who was Vice President of the students' organization of EPP until recently.

2.1.2. Reformist Bloc (RB)

The parliamentary group of the Reformist Bloc comprises 23 MPs. Radan Kanev and Meglena Kuneva were elected Co-chairpersons of the group. Meglena Kuneva became Deputy Prime Minister of the new government. Borislav Velikov from Bulgarian New Democracy Party, Korman Ismailov from People's Party 'Freedom and Dignity' and Borislav Milanov are Deputy Chairmen of the group. Well known political figures among the Reformist Bloc MPs are the former leader of UDF Martin Dimitrov, Rumen Hristov, who was presidential candidate from the Blue Coalition in 2011, and former Mayor of the town of Pleven Nayden Zelenogorski.

After becoming part of the Executive, the tension in the Reformist Bloc remained. So, for instance, after Kuneva was elected

member of the government, the attempt to elect a new Co-Chairman of the parliamentary group failed, because the DSB representatives blocked the nomination of BCM.

Tension was caused by the election of Deputy Speaker of the Parliament from the quota of the Bloc too. Grozdan Karadzhev from DSB stated that Nikolai Nenchev was supported for the position initially, but Meglena Kuneva impeded his election in favor of Ivan Ivanov. Karadzhev accused Kuneva further that she was coercing the Reformist Bloc all the time and, threatening it with a split up, always had it her way.

Convening the RB Congress to elect the Bloc's Chairman also sparked tension between DSB and Kuneva's party. The congress was even called off once after Bulgaria for the Citizens Movement blocked it.

Meglena Kuneva stated that there will be a congress when everyone believes that the coalition is ready for it. She said further that currently RB has no executive Board to draft the rules for the congress. In addition, she believes that it would be counterproductive to hold a union congress of the Bloc given the "current high level of distrust towards the parties in it". Kuneva thinks that a congress of this kind should be convened only when the results of the reforms that RB has committed to in the government are seen. In her words "the lack of confidence can be overcome with reforms and work".

DSB leader Radan Kanev stated that he was in favor of a union congress. He expressed hope that "no one would backslide on the congress because it would be a very unreasonable thing to do. It is about time to hold this congress."

Tension was also caused by the wish of BCM to do away with the Civil Board of the Bloc. Naiden Zelenogorski said that the Civil Board was a structure created when the union was created to serve as a bridge to

civil society and to participate in formulating and making decisions. According to Zelenogorski that body had already exhausted its role. UDF led by Bozhidar Lukarski also proclaimed abolition of the Civil Board. One of the reasons for his wish was that the parties of Kuneva and Lukarski felt strongly suspicious of the Civil Board because of the public support of the majority for Radan Kanev's nomination for RB leader. A topical reason for the discontent of DBG and UDF was also the position of the Civil Board regarding the withdrawal of the nomination of Bozhidar Lukarski for Minister of the Economy.

One of the prominent figures of the Civil Board – Prof. Velislav Minekov, left RB to demonstrate his disagreement after RB entered into a coalition with GERB.

The discontent from the participation in a coalition together with GERB, ABV and the Patriotic Front is also apparent among some circles of RB supporters. All these controversies demonstrate that the future of the coalition remains questionable and the inner-party squabbling may prevail in the first more serious crisis of the government.

2.1.3. Patriotic Front (PF)

The parliamentary group of the Patriotic Front is the fifth largest group in the National Assembly and comprises 19 MPs. The Leader of the National Front for Salvation of Bulgaria NFSB and Co-Chairman of PF Valeri Simeonov is Chairman of the group. The other Co-Chairman of the Front – Krasimir Karakachanov, VMRO leader, became Deputy Speaker of Parliament.

PF is a typical nationalist and populist formation, similar to "Ataka". In his speech at the opening of the 43rd National Assembly Valeri Simeonov mentioned some of the main goals the Front will attempt to attain, for instance: banning the newscasts in Turkish on the national TV, deploying

missile stations along the Bulgarian-Turkish border as counter terrorist measures, teaching children compulsorily if they don't speak Bulgarian when they start school.

The Patriotic Front is a coalition comprising two main parties – NFSB and VMRO, but there are some smaller formations there too, which makes the relations between them quite complex and this was confirmed by the developments in the political situation during the first days of the new government.

After PF signed a declaration of support for the government of Borisov, in practical terms they became part of the ruling majority, in spite of not having any representatives in the government at the level of ministers. The expectations, however, are that they have representatives in the second tier of the executive. The controversies in the Front became apparent as early as when the government was voted. The Members of Parliament Slavi Binev and Velizar Enchev, who had been some of the fiercest critics of Boyko Borisov and his government over the past years, did not support Borisov's nomination for Prime Minister.

The first serious challenge facing the new government majority came after Orhan Ismailov from the People's Party 'Freedom and Dignity' was appointed Deputy Minister of Defense. Valeri Simeonov said that he was a 'representative of a pro-Turkish party' and it was unacceptable to be appointed in that position. Simeonov urged Orhan Ismailov to step down or they would withdraw their support for the government.

The Patriotic Front was accused by representatives from almost the entire political spectrum that their behavior was a manifestation of ethnic intolerance and that the reason they demanded Ismailov's resignation was that he had a Turkish name. Krasimir Karakachanov denied the accusations and said that the problem was not the name of Orhan Ismailov, but the fact that he represented an

ethnic party, which he thought People's Party 'Freedom and Dignity' actually was. According to Karakachanov, the PPF leader "proudly poses for pictures with Erdogan, who claims that men and women are not equal".

After another representative of the party was appointed regional Governor of Sofia, PF leaders declared that they are most likely to withdraw their support for the government.

2.1.4. ABV

For a new formation like ABV, making it to the National Assembly in the first general elections they took part in is a success. Despite the fact that the ABV parliamentary group is one of the smallest in the parliament, comprising 11 MPs, it will have an important role to play, as it is part of the newly formed ruling majority. Electing Ivailo Kalfin Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Labor and Social Policy, ABV will practically be part of the executive and will bear the political responsibility for one of the most sensitive areas – social policy. For a left wing formation like ABV, taking part in the Executive together with parties from the right wing is a big challenge in view of its establishment as a political actor. On the one hand, ABV is subjected to criticism from BSP for the fact that it had entered into a coalition with Boyko Borisov, and on the other – their partner from RB will look at the party without confidence because of the firm stance ABV in support of the Russian energy projects.

ABV, however, stated that their participation in the government would help the political stability this country needed at that moment. ABV leader Georgi Parvanov said that the easier and more convenient way for the party to be established as a new formation was to stay in opposition, but the nationally responsible approach required taking on the real political responsibility by sharing the burden of carrying out the necessary reforms in

the country. Parvanov outlined several major reasons for ABV to be part of the government. According to him the first one was that "Bulgaria should have a new government, rather than appoint new elections, as this would be detrimental and catastrophic". On the other hand, to put it in his words, "Bulgaria needs a proper and stable government. In this respect, we stand close to the idea of GERB for a stable government."

Despite the fact that Georgi Parvanov refused to run for Member of Parliament, with the explanation that he had been President of the Republic, Georgi Parvanov is not only the leader of ABV, but also the politician who, to a great extent, personifies the party. Another significant figure of the left in ABV – Rumens Petkov, did not win a seat as a Member of Parliament. Among the more-important and recognizable public and political figures in ABV are Prof. Borislav Borislavov, Former President of the University of National and World Economy, former Chief of General Staff of the Bulgarian Armed forces General Miho Mihov, former Minister of Trade and International Economic Cooperation in Zhan Videnov's government (1994-1996) Kiril Tsochev, and recent Mayor of the city of Pernik Rossitsa Yanakieva.

2.2. Trends in the Parliamentary Opposition

2.2.1 „BSP - Left Bulgaria“

The parliamentary group of BSP – Left Bulgaria comprises 39 MPs. Chairman of the group will be BSP leader Mihail Mikov. Angel Naidenov, Atanas Merdzhanov and Kornelia Ninova were elected his deputies, secretary of the group is Zhelio Boychev. The MP with the longest standing experience among BSP MPs – Yanaki Stoilov, was elected Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly.

The severe loss of BSP in the elections gave reason for rethinking the party policy

on the part of its leadership and looking for ways out of the crisis it is currently in. Immediately after the elections BSP declared that they would be a constructive opposition to GERB, because that was the role the voters chose to give to the party. Nonetheless, the party participated in the talks initiated by GERB for forming a new government. There were voices in BSP that insisted that the party concede to forming a wide coalition, proposed by GERB. Angel Naidenov said that BSP "should express readiness to participate in a wide coalition government". According to him, he was not the only one in the party who believes that BSP should be part of the government. ABV also urged their former fellow party members to participate in a wide coalition, which they would support.

According to party activists, the reasons for BSP to remain in opposition were due to the weak election results of the party. If the party had 60-70 MPs, then forming a wide coalition would be possible, because it would be a union between two parties of relatively equal weight. This was also the explanation offered by BSP leader Mihail Mikov, who stated that the German variation of a wide coalition between left and right was not possible in Bulgaria at that moment, because GERB and BSP would have a total of 123 MPs in a house of 240 seats.

The weak results of BSP resulted in changes of the leadership of the party. Mikov was urged by his fellow party members to start reforms in BSP, without which the party would continue to shrink in electoral terms. Kiril Dobrev was among the people in BSP who spoke most eloquently of the need for reform in the party. According to him the party lost its positions because of three people in the leadership – Dimitar Dabov, Evgeni Uzunov and Katya Nikolova, "who have been sitting on the podium of each single congress of the party since 1990". Dobrev

voiced the opinion that "this troika has been deciding who will make progress and who will be crushed in the party lines for years". He said further that between "140 and 180 of the delegates in each congress are paid apparatus – people who receive their salary from the party headquarters." According to Dobrev the last elections have demonstrated the lack of ideas of the party and its declining organizational potential. To put it in his words, "in these elections everything collapsed and we have no ideas, no cause. The myth of the organizational potential of the party collapsed. We are talking about a drowned and lost generation under the leadership of these people". Dobrev stated that he would fight for a change in the party.

Despite expectations for radical change in BSP Mihail Mikov parted with only three of the members of the Executive Bureau and cut the composition of the top party leadership from 21 to 18 people. This happened after a decision of the National Council of the party. The people dismissed from the leadership are indicative personae – two of the long standing deputy chairmen of the party – Dimitar Dabov and Evgeni Uzunov. The third person dismissed was the former Minister of Defense and long serving BSP spokesman Angel Naidenov. The motif for his dismissal from the Executive Bureau was that Naidenov was a Deputy Chairman of the Parliamentary Group and it was necessary to separate party engagements from those in Parliament.

In his capacity of Deputy Chairman Dabov was in charge of the organizational affairs in the party. The recent secretary in charge of the media Anton Kutev and Stanislav Vladimirov will be entrusted with this task and both of them will be organizational secretaries.

Mikov kept the former deputy chairmen Yanaki Stoilov and Dragomir Stoinev, and nominated yet another deputy – Boyko Ve-

likov. Georgi Pirinski, who was also deputy chairman of the party will no longer have the position, as he became a Member of the European Parliament.

2.2.2. MRF

MRF attained some of the best results in parliamentary elections so far and the party will have 38 MPs in the new parliament. Party leader Lyutvi Mestan is Chairman of the parliamentary group. Former minister of Environment in the Oresharski cabinet Stanislav Atanasov and the members of parliament Tuncher Kurdzhaliev and Ferihan Ahmedova were elected his deputies. Secretary of the parliamentary group is the lawyer Chetin Kazak.

Delyan Peevski was elected Member of Parliament yet again. He had not attended sessions in the plenary hall since his short-lived election for Chairman of the State Agency for National Security that gave rise to protests last summer.

After the elections MRF fell into political isolation, which became apparent during the consultations GERB held with the other parliamentary represented political forces for forming a government. MRF stated that they would unconditionally support a minority cabinet of GERB only, or of GERB and the Reformist Bloc without any participation on the government on their part. Lyutvi Mestan said that his party would even give a '600 days tolerance' to such a cabinet if they committed to implementing the necessary reforms.

According to Lyutvi Mestan the vote of the electorate had clearly demonstrated that there should be a center-right government formed in the country and that MRF would support such a cabinet. Nonetheless, the MRF leader opposed sharply a new coalition with the participation of the Patriotic Front. Mestan called it an "anti-European" coalition because a national-populist party was part of it, which

proclaims values that are incompatible with the Euro-Atlantic orientation of the country.

Lyutvi Mestan even wrote a letter to EPP leader Joseph Daul where he expressed his concern that EPP member parties like GERB and RB participate in a coalition with extreme nationalists who do not respect European values.

When the new government of Boyko Borisov was voted into Parliament, Lyutvi Mestan stated that his party would be a categorical opposition to the majority where nationalists take part. The reasons were the insurmountable difference in values between MRF as a liberal party and the PF as an antipode to liberalism. Mestan accused Borisov that he opted for a union with nationalists rather than the support by MRF as a result of the ungrounded 'satanization' of the movement. Yet again Mestan noted that the attempt to put MRF in isolation may have dangerous consequences for the ethnic and religious peace in the country.

2.2.3. Bulgarian Democratic Center (BDC)

After entering the 43rd National Assembly the Bulgaria without Censorship coalition of Nikolay Barekov renamed themselves to Parliamentary Group Bulgarian Democratic Center. The leadership of the group presented their motives for the change as the intent of the parties in the coalition to position themselves in the political center. The parliamentary group of BDC comprises 14 MPs. Svetlin Tanchev was elected Chairman of the group. He was a GERB MP in the previous parliament, but left the party after disagreement with the policies of the leadership. Deputy Chairmen are Kuncho Filipov from the Leader Party and Rumen Yonchev from the Agrarian Popular Union.

BDC was the first parliamentary group to be left by an MP elected on its lists. Anna

Barakova, who was elected MP in Plovdiv left the party even before the first session of the house was convened, and became the first MP not to be a member of any parliamentary group.

Nikolay Barekov, who was elected MP, chose to stay an MEP. In this way Barekov in practical terms withdrew from the internal politics of this country. Proof of this is that he had limited media exposure and less public appearances last month.

After the elections BDC took some controversial and unequivocal positions. Barekov stated many times that he would be in opposition to GERB, but at the same time in the name of political stability he claimed that he would be prepared to support an expert government with wider parliamentary support.

The talks GERB had with BDC within the consultations initiated by the party that won the elections were interrupted due to "insurmountable differences in values" to quote GERB's Menda Stoyanova.

When voting the line-up of the cabinet proposed by Borisov, BDC supported Borisov's nomination for Prime Minister but was against the composition of the government. This position of BDC should be regarded as a signal to GERB and Boyko Borisov that Barekov's formation would support the government on certain topics only.

On the whole, the BDC parliamentary group is mixed in terms of composition, because different parties have representatives in it. In the future this might result in controversies in it and even split it up. The reasons are to a great extent in the high corporate dependence of the Bulgaria without Censorship project. The Leader Party, which is connected to the businessman Hristo Kovachki might also prove unpredictable as a partner from the point of view of the personal business interest of their infor-

mal leader. This is why in the mid-term it is possible to have situational re-grouping, in one direction or another, of the parties that compose the parliamentary group Bulgarian Democratic Center.

2.2.4. "Ataka"

Despite the expectations of a number of analysts, "Ataka" managed to overcome the 4% barrier in the last elections too. Among the main reasons for that are the increase in electricity prices that the caretaker government passed a week prior to the elections, and which made some extreme left voters vote for Ataka. The position of the party on the sanctions against Russia and the conflict in the Ukraine attracted in its turn some pro-Russian voters. Not insignificant for the success of "Ataka" was also the low turnout in the elections, which made it possible for smaller parties to enter parliament.

In his speech at the opening of the 43rd National Assembly Volen Siderov criticized EU policies yet again. According to him the current EU does not protect the interests of the member states and their peoples, and this is why it "has to be disbanded". The "Ataka" leader addressed the ambassadors present in the plenary hall to convey to their capital to "stop the sanctions against Russia immediately", because in this way they "are committing suicide against their own nations". Siderov added that Bulgaria "does not want to be pushed into war against our saviors". "You did it on two occasions and both times we waged a war that ended in national catastrophe, we are not going to allow it to happen a third time," he added.

The parliamentary group of "Ataka" comprises 11 MPs. Desislav Chukolov and Prof. Stanislav Stanilov were elected Deputy Chairmen. The lawyer Yavor Notev will be Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly from the quota of "Ataka".

Immediately after the elections Ataka made it clear that it will be in radical opposition. The party refused to attend the consultations GERB initiated with the other parliamentary represented parties.

GERB stated that in the spirit of good parliamentary tradition they would give the opportunity to the opposition parliamentary groups to chair one of the parliamentary committees. However, Siderov declined this proposal.

Siderov did not attend the consultations at the office of the President, which take place prior to giving the mandate for appointing a government to the largest parliamentary group. He said that he would not attend any kind of talks behind closed doors. The leader of "Ataka" said that he would go to the consultations only if TV cameras were allowed in.

3. Main Conclusions and Forecasts

1. Forming a government regularly elected by the National Assembly was an important step in the direction of overcoming the political and parliamentary crisis in this country. Despite the difficulties that the process of forming the government went through, at this stage it will enjoy the necessary parliamentary support needed for passing the budget for next year and the financial stabilization of the country. These are the urgent measures that the ruling majority has to resolve in the short-term. The economic situation remains complex. Lack of investment and almost zero economic growth do not allow the economy to overcome the crisis. The not reformed sectors, like healthcare, education, the pension system and energy, worsen the economic and social problems. The new ruling majority promised that they will commit to reforms which, however, look difficult to carry out,

due to the mixed nature of the parties that support the government. It is possible in the mid-term that the government relies on thematic parliamentary majorities to implement certain policies and legislative decisions.

2. The victory in the elections and the appointment of a government led by Boyko Borisov is of paramount importance for GERB to be established as a leading political force in this country. Borisov is the first politician to be Prime Minister for a second time after the beginning of the democratic changes in this country. GERB's leader is trying to demonstrate a new political image, different from the one during his first term of office. This reflects on the style and the behavior of GERB which, at least for the time being, shows a willingness for dialogue, seeking consensus and a new coalition culture. As mandate carrier GERB will bear the main political responsibility of the government, which is why the party will focus its effort on supporting the Executive authority.

3. The Reformist Bloc attained one of its goals – representation in Parliament and participation in the Executive. At the same time the Bloc is facing some serious challenges related to assertion of its unity. The controversies between DSB and BCM on convening a congress to elect a party leader are heading towards undermining the fragile center-right coalition. This, in its turn, creates a danger for the integrity of the ruling coalition. RB took on the most difficult and unreformed sectors in the government, which might bring them additional negatives if there are no quick results in the lines that their ministers are in charge of.

4. The Patriotic front is a coalition of nationalist parties, which showed that it is an unstable partner of GERB. The threats to withdraw the support for the government if Deputy Minister of Defense Orhan Ismailov

is not replaced proved that PF is a formation which the government can hardly depend on in the mid- and long-term. On the other hand, PF support for Borisov's government creates an image problem in Europe. Critical voices were heard coming from Europe against their participation in the government coalition.

5. With ABV taking part in the government, the ruling majority expanded their support for the left political wing. Taking part in the government is undoubtedly a challenge for a new political formation like ABV, but it is also an opportunity to establish itself by taking on political responsibility in one of the most sensitive sectors – social policy.

6. BSP refused to take part in a wide coalition, which GERB proposed, and the party remained in opposition. The main challenge BSP is faced with is an internal reform that brings the party back on track as a leading political force. At this stage Mihail Mikov is content with some insignificant changes of the leadership, which will hardly be enough if that does not go hand in hand with a realistic evaluation of the problems of the party and an overall strategy for its political and ideological renewal.

7. MRF fell into political isolation. The party offered their support to a center-right

cabinet of GERB and RB without participating in it with their own representatives, which was categorically rejected by the latter two. MRF stated that they will be in opposition to a government supported by nationalists. The criticism toward MRF over the past years and its negative image in society are due not to its electoral profile but to its corporate and oligarchic dependencies.

8. BDC's role has become less and less significant over the past month. The main reason for that is the decision of Nikolai Barekov to stay an MEP and not an MP in the Bulgarian National Assembly as elected. It seems that this decision will reflect on the image of the formation, which was mainly related to him. At this stage BDC has rather an oppositional behavior, which does not exclude support for the government on certain topics.

9. "Ataka" will be an extreme anti-system opposition, which was seen in the behavior of the party over the past month. Most likely it will rely on the same strategy in the future too. For the first time, Ataka has a real competitor in the nationalist field – the Patriotic Front. This will make its rhetoric even more radical, particularly given the current situation, where PF still supports Borisov's government.

About the editor:

Professor, Doctor of Philosophy, Georgi Karasimeonov teaches at Sofia University "St. Clement of Ohrid", Director of the Institute for Political and Legal Studies and editor of "Political Research." He was Chairman of the Bulgarian Political Science Association from 1991 to 1998.

Contact: ipls@dir.bg



Imprint

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
Office Bulgaria
97, Knjaz Boris I St.
1000 Sofia, Bulgaria
Responsible:
Regine Schubert, Director

Orders

e-mail: office@fes.bg

Commercial use of all media
published by the Friedrich-
Ebert-Stiftung (FES) is
not permitted without the
written consent of the FES.

All texts are available online

www.fes.bg

The views expressed in this publication
are not necessarily those of the
Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung or of the
organization for which the author works.