

A light gray world map is in the background. A red square is placed over Bulgaria, with a thin black line extending from it to the left, underlining the word 'Sofia' in the header.

# BAROMETER

## Political parties in Bulgaria

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- The new government, made up of GERB and United Patriots, seems stable at this stage. The participation in the cabinet of two co-chairs of the patriots is a guarantee for their close involvement in the country's governance. At this stage, there are no more significant negative reactions in Europe, due to the participation of nationalists in the government. Borisov's foreign policy activity shows that in his third term of office he will try to strengthen his role on the international scene.
- With its first action in parliament, the BSP has shown that it will want to be strong opposition which governments will have to bear in mind. The call for resignation of the President of the National Assembly was evidence of this. Cornelia Ninova continues with reshaping the party, showing firmness and consistency in positions regarding its future development.
- A large number of the extraparlimentary parties in the right space are increasingly disintegrating. The intentions and calls for unification have been going on for years, but remain declarative. Mutual accusations of the failure in the parliamentary elections continue to be the focus of attention, which is a major obstacle to maintaining a normal and fair dialogue between the parties.

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## 1. The political situation

### 1.1. Domestic policy

The political situation in the past quarter was mainly determined by the process of setting up the new government after the early parliamentary elections and its first steps since its formation.

Immediately after the elections, it became clear that GERB would form a government with the United Patriots. Negotiations continued for nearly a month, and the two formations insisted on agreeing first on the priorities of the new government and then on its staff. Although the party "Volya" ("Will") headed by businessman Veselin Mareshik gave indications that they would participate in the government with their ministers, they were not invited to the final phase of the talks.

The third cabinet of Boyko Borisov started its work in May. The National Assembly supported the government with the votes of 133 MPs from GERB, the United Parities and MPs of "Volya". BSP and MRF voted against and will be opposition to the government. The government has four Deputy Prime Ministers. Tomislav Donchev from GERB, who was deputy prime minister in the previous GERB cabinet, again took up this post. Two of the co-chairs of the lower coalition partner of GERB - United Patriots, Krassimir Karakachanov and Valery Simeonov are also vice-presidents. VMRO leader Krasimir Karakachanov is Deputy Prime Minister for Public Order and Security and Minister of Defense. NSCS leader Valeri Simeonov was elected deputy prime minister for economic and demographic policy, but will not head a ministry. The Minister of Justice in the second cabinet of Borisov, Ekaterina Zaharieva, this time will be the Deputy Prime Minister for Justice Reform and Minister of Foreign Affairs. Zaharieva was head of the

Cabinet of President Plevneliev and Deputy Prime Minister in the two offices appointed by him during his term as President. Tsetska Tsacheva, who was the chair of the National Assembly, was elected Minister of Justice, and in the last presidential elections was nominated for this post by GERB.

Most GERB ministers from the second cabinet of Borisov retain their posts in the third one. Vladislav Goranov is again Minister of Finance. Nikolina Angelkova will once again be responsible for tourism. Krasen Kralev remains Minister of Youth and Sports. Ivaylo Moskovski will be Minister of Transport, Information Technology and Communications for the third time. Temenujka Petkova returns again as a minister in the Ministry of Energy. Surprisingly, Lilyana Pavlova, who for many years was Minister of Regional Development and Public Works, will be Minister in the newly established ministry for the Bulgarian Presidency of the EU Council in January 2018. Her place in the regional ministry is taken by Nikolay Nankov, who was previously Pavlova's deputy. Minister of the Interior will be Valentin Radev, who up to now was an MP of GERB and a member of the parliamentary committee on defense and security. Bisser Petkov, a longtime expert in the field of social policy and former manager of the National Social Security Institute, will be minister of Labor and Social Policy. Krassimir Valchev, who for many years held the post of Secretary of the Ministry of Education is to be Minister of Education and Science. The theatrical director Boil Banov will be Minister of Culture. He was Deputy Minister at this ministry in Borisov's second cabinet. Rumen Porozhanov, head of the State Fund «Agriculture» during the GERB government will be Minister of Agriculture, Food and Forestry. Of the quota of United Patriots, besides the two Deputy Prime

Ministers, Neno Dimov will be the Minister of Environment and Water, and Emil Karanikolov is to be the Minister of Economy. The fact that both of them were listed as United Patriot's quota ministers came as a surprise, because until now their names have not in any way been associated with nationalist formations. Neno Dimov was Deputy Minister in the same ministry in Ivan Kostov's government, and until recently he worked at the Institute for Right Policy. Emil Karanikolov was head of the Agency for Privatization and Post-privatization Control.

The agenda of the new government focuses on several priority areas. One of them is education, which was mentioned as a key priority for GERB, with the envisaged doubling of teachers' salaries by the end of the mandate. The minimum wage is also set to reach BGN 650 and the average to be BGN 1,500 within the mandate, and the minimum pension is to be increased to BGN 200. Among the priorities of the government will be Bulgaria's accession to Schengen and the preservation of the currency board until accession of the country to the Single Banking Union and the Eurozone.

In the area of justice, the government plans to adopt a new anti-corruption law by creating a single anti-corruption body based on the Commission for the seizure of illegally acquired property. Further adoption of amendments to the Code of Criminal Procedure, and the creation of a new order for the prosecution of high-level corruption by passing these cases to the specialized court and the prosecutor's office is envisaged. The adoption of a new Penal Code as well as the introduction of e-government by the end of 2018 is also planned. In the field of health care starting phased de-monopolization of the National Health Insurance Fund is planned.

## 1.2 External and European policies

In the past quarter, the Bulgarian state has conducted an active foreign policy. President Rumen Radev took part in the NATO summit held in late May. The president defended the position that engaging NATO in the fight against terrorism and involving the organization in the international anti-terrorist coalition is an important solution that will reduce the flow of migrants to Europe. At the Brussels summit, President Radev confirmed that Bulgaria would increase its defense resources. Bulgaria has already committed to a gradual increase in the defense budget, with the target of 2% of GDP to be reached in 2024.

At the beginning of June, Prime Minister Borisov made three significant cross-border visits, which had serious repercussions not only in Bulgaria but also abroad. With visits to Paris, Berlin and Ankara within a week, Borisov showed that his government will seek to lead an active foreign policy on the eve of the Bulgarian EU Council presidency in 2018.

Borisov's first official visit abroad was the meeting with the new French President Emmanuel Macron. The two talked about the development of the relations between Bulgaria and France and discussed the processes in the European Union. The Bulgarian Prime Minister said that Macron has accepted his invitation to visit Bulgaria in August this year. They also talked about the willingness of Bulgaria to join the ERM2 mechanism in order to join the Eurozone. Moreover, the Bulgarian Prime Minister raised the issue of Bulgaria's accession to Schengen, because the country has long fulfilled the membership criteria and has proved to be a reliable external border of the Union in recent years. The Bulgarian Prime Minister stressed that he met France on this issue and hopes that very soon this will find a positive solution.

After his meeting with President Macron, Boyko Borisov left for Berlin, where he was to meet German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel. Highlights of the talks were bilateral relations and cooperation within the European Union. At his meeting with the German President Borisov said Bulgaria would continue to rely on German experience and support in priority areas for the country, such as the preparation of the Bulgarian presidency of the EU Council, security and guarding the borders, investment and dual education. At these talks, as well as during the meeting with the French president, Borisov specifically emphasized Bulgaria's desire to enter the Eurozone waiting room and to have the country join Schengen.

During his meeting with Chancellor Merkel, Prime Minister Borisov said that with its forthcoming presidency of the Council of the European Union next year Bulgaria could do much to help the Balkan countries that aspire to EU membership. In his words, this will be one of the main priorities of the Bulgarian presidency. Chancellor Merkel, for her part, said that Germany has always supported reforms in the country, in which progress can already be seen. In addition, the Chancellor noted Bulgaria's role in securing the border with Turkey, and although it is not a member of Schengen, the country has significantly improved border control. Borisov and Merkel discussed the measures that Bulgaria should take in combating trafficking in human beings and illegal migrants.

A week after his visit to Paris and Berlin, Boyko Borisov visited Turkey, where he met President Recep Erdoğan and Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım. Borisov said he had spoken to President Erdoğan on various topics. The Bulgarian Prime Minister has stressed that

without the active role of Turkey there will be no effective security at the border. According to Borisov, during the referendum in Turkey and the elections in Bulgaria there has been some tension, due to «frayed nerves on many sides», but now everything has been normalized.

Borisov acknowledged the role of Turkey in reducing refugee pressure. He hopes to normalize relations between the EU and Turkey in order to continue the good cooperation, which is in the interests of both sides. Borisov also said he would continue to insist on the continuation of the Refugee Agreement. He expressed his conviction that Bulgaria and Turkey could really be a benchmark for good neighborliness. In his words during the Bulgarian presidency of the EU Council, it is important to make efforts in normalizing relations between the EU and Turkey.

Borisov expressed his satisfaction that, during the talks with the Turkish Prime Minister there was convergence on a number of topics, including energy projects. Prime Minister Yıldırım mentioned the attempted coup in June last year, saying that «Europe reacted with silence,» while Bulgaria openly condemned these actions. The Turkish PM thanked Borisov for the support, remarking that after the coup attempt he visited Turkey, demonstrating solidarity with the Turkish people, government and president. The Turkish Prime Minister also highlighted the forthcoming EU presidency of the EU Council in 2018, which, in his words, is important for Turkey's European perspective. Ankara asked Borisov, during the Bulgarian Presidency, that visas for Turkish citizens for EU countries be removed and for a clear roadmap for Turkey's entry into the EU to be drawn.

The increase in the foreign policy activity of the Bulgarian government is also due

to the forthcoming presidency of the EU Council, which will start on January 1, 2018. Therefore, the efforts of Borisov's Cabinet will be focused not only on the preparations for which a new ministry has already been established, but also on strengthening the role of the country at European level, as the presidency provides. This was also evident during these three significant visits of the Bulgarian Prime Minister, which outlined one of the main priorities that Bulgaria will pursue during the presidency - on the role and the place of the Balkans in the context of European and regional security and in particular on integration of the Western Balkans into the EU.

It was exactly the integration of the Western Balkans that was the subject during the visit of the new Macedonian Prime Minister Zoran Zaev to Sofia. He had a meeting with Prime Minister Borisov and President Radev. On the Bulgarian side, it was emphasized that Sofia has always supported the Euro-Atlantic perspective for Macedonia, and it was agreed that the long-awaited Neighborhood Neighborhood Agreement should be signed during the visit of Prime Minister Borosov to Skopje on August 2. This date was chosen symbolically, because it celebrated the anniversary of the Ilinden-Preobrazhenie uprising. The two Prime Ministers have agreed to celebrate the festivities of common holidays and events in the history of the two countries. There was symbolic significance in the presentation of flowers by the two Prime Ministers in front of the monument of the Bulgarian Tsar Samuil in Sofia, which at the end of the tenth century transferred the capital of the Bulgarian state to Ohrid.

### 1.3 The refugee crisis

In this quarter the building of the last section of the fence along the Turkish border continued. This issue has led to disputes

between the BSP and the government. The BSP has levied the accusation that, despite the decision to build a two-line fence, in some places it is actually one-line, which, according to the Socialists, is due to corruption. In addition, the BSP said that reports over recent months should be checked that companies associated with representatives of the United Patriots participated in the construction of the fence. The BSP even appealed to the prosecutor's office, and the State Security Agency (DANS) is currently investigating the case.

Despite a sustained reduction in the refugee wave, the problem of trafficking remains a challenge to the authorities in the country. This was also confirmed by the serious accident on the Trakia highway in early June, killing 10 people in the case of migrant trafficking to Western Europe. The investigation into the case found that this was an organized human trafficking group involving Bulgarian citizens and an Afghan who had been detained.

The issue of refugees will be at the focus of the forthcoming changes to the so-called Dublin Agreement. Bulgarian MEPs have united in the understanding that the Dublin regulation on refugee problems is not working effectively, and the new agreement that the European Parliament will vote for in the summer needs not just cosmetic, but significant changes to bring lasting results.

The new asylum system is particularly important for border countries such as Bulgaria, Greece and Italy, who are holding informal talks about the new rules on refugees. PES leader Stanishev also suggests that countries in the Western, Central and Eastern Mediterranean should not accept applications for registration of migrants from other Member States. Emil Radev of GERB and the Bulgarian MEPs from the Group



of the European People's Party offer their responsibility to accept the countries to which migrants apply for asylum and not countries about to enter the EU for the first time.

## **2. State and development of major political parties**

### **2.1. Social Democratic and other center-left parties**

#### **2.1.1. BSP**

##### **2.1.1.1. Condition**

Also during this quarter BSP leader, Cornelia Ninova, continued with the changes in the party. In mid-May, the BSP National Council adopted the proposed changes in the Party's Executive Bureau. Members of the Executive Bureau were released: Krassimir Yankov, Ivan Chenchev, Stoyan Mirchev, Alexander Simov and Vesela Lecheva. Kiril Dobrev chose to remain in the Executive Bureau and leave parliament.

The newly elected members of the BSP executive body proposed by Ninova are: the mayor of Gotse Delchev, Vladimir Moskov, Atanaska Teneva from Plovdiv and Apostol Dimitrov from Varna. The party leadership remains as Stefan Danailov, Valery Zhablyanov, Dragomir Stoynev and Krum Zarkov.

Cornelia Ninova will now have four deputies. The BSP National Council elected Stefan Danailov as Deputy Chairman of the Public Policy Party. Deputy Chairman responsible for party activity will be Kiril Dobrev. Vladimir Moskov was elected deputy chairman of the Local Government, and Denitsa Zlateva, Deputy Prime Minister of Ognian Gerdjikov's Office of Government, will be Deputy Chairman of European Affairs and International Affairs. Vyara Emilova was elected as "election" secretary.

The former leader of BSP, Mihail Mikov,

described the changes as clearing the pitch for the team of Cornelia Ninova. In his words, «she is looking for new and faithful people, she wants to get signboards from the Executive Bureau under the label «Separating Functions». According to Mikov, however, a double standard is seen, because some will preserve the parliamentary functions as well as the functions in the Executive Bureau, while others will not. The former BSP organizational secretary, Krasimir Yankov, criticized Kornelia Ninova openly, saying that the BSP did not hear any opinion other than that of the party leader. He predicted that Ninova would not have a full mandate at the head of the party because a leader must unite, not divide. And Ninova does exactly that – she separates the party. According to him, Ninova believes that by removing the recognizable members of the BSP leadership she is relieved of dependencies, but this is rather an attempt to eliminate internal-party competition.

The leader of BSP, Kornelia Ninova, will also be chair of the parliamentary group of BSP for Bulgaria. The deputy chairs of the group will be Anton Kutev, Dragomir Stoynev, Zhelyu Boychev and Krum Zarkov. Georgi Turnovilyiski, Kristian Vigenin and Philip Popov will be secretaries, and Elena Yoncheva will be spokesperson of the group.

With their 80 MPs BSP are expected to be a strong opposition. This was evident in the resignation of the President of the National Assembly, Glavchev, who, with the vote, maintained his position with only 4 votes in favor. The request for Glavchev's resignation was motivated by the fact that GERB MP Spas Gurnevski called BSP «a non-Bulgarian socialist party». According to Kornelia Ninova, the Speaker of Parliament Dimitar Glavchev has not implemented the Rules of the National Assembly and has not punished

Gurnevski for improper conduct. This scandal has shown that in this National Assembly we will witness sharp clashes between those in power and the opposition.

At the beginning of June the BSP adopted a Code of Ethical Behavior for the members of the parliamentary group. Members of BSP for Bulgaria are not allowed to use their official position for personal gain, privilege or discharge, conceal their illegal actions or escape punishment. Deputies cannot disclose or benefit for personal purposes from information received in their capacity as MPs. It is not allowed for left-wing MPs to use official means or cars for personal trips in the country and abroad. The Code of Ethics also includes special rules against corruption and conflict of interest.

The past quarter will also be remembered for the scandal with one of the significant names in BSP - businessman Georgi Gergov. This regards a meeting mediated by Gergov in his office between Chief Prosecutor Sotir Tsatsarov and the head of Overgas, Sasho Dontchev. The two accused each other of trying to influence each other, as Donchev tried to get the Chief Prosecutor's protection. He himself accused Donchev as the owner of the Sega newspaper that the newspaper was used as a stand against the Chief Prosecutor. The fact that Gergov's name was involved in this scandal caused Cornelia Ninova to ask for his resignation as a member of the BSP Executive Bureau. And if it was not voted by the National Council, Ninova threatened to resign. Gergov reacted sharply to Ninova's request, saying that she had become chairman of the party with his support and the votes he had secured at the congress as leader of the Plovdiv BSP organization. Ninova said she wanted to change the party and remove the suspicions

of backstage machinations in her business and would be uncompromising in the future when it came to the authority of the BSP.

With these actions, Ninova showed willingness and courage to uphold the principles of transparency and openness she promised to follow in her election as party chair. At the same time, however, there are more and more internal partisans and opponents, and this will be a great challenge in her work as a party leader.

### **2.1.1.2. Recommendations**

It is necessary for the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) to continue with its strong oppositional behavior without, however, leading to unprincipled confrontation. In a party-party plan, a balance must be found between change and dialogue in the party. Going to extremes can create tension and controversy, and this will only weaken the party.

### **2.1.2. ABV and Movement 21**

#### **2.1.2.1. Condition**

After the elections, ABV and Movement 21 have continued on their own path of development. The two formations participated in an election coalition in order to increase their chances of overcoming the electoral barrier. Henceforth, they will have to be re-evaluated not only regarding the pre-election campaign, but also their place, role and strategies for their development in the political life of the country.

In ABV the election of a new chairman just before the election was presented as a desire for renewal of the party through a generational change of the elite in it and the putting faith in new faces. This did not bring the expected result, partly due to the short lead in which the new leader Konstantin Prodanov had to unfold



the campaign. After the election, Prodanov said that from now on, ABV would focus on change by trying to attract new, young people to be involved in the cause of the party. In his words, this is the path of ABV, his short-term task as a leader is to strengthen grass roots party structures. In addition, ABC will act as a corrective of the management and will seek to offer alternative policies.

Movement 21, headed by Tatiana Doncheva, has not yet taken stock of its participation in the elections. In the past quarter, the leader of the movement Tatiana Doncheva has been a frequent guest on a number of TV shows, where she continued to defend one of her main concerns - the need for a fundamental change in the political system, which, she says, the current government cannot do. Doncheva continues to uphold the position of radical reform in the prosecutor's office - one of the topical issues in public life, especially in the context of scandals related to the Chief Prosecutor and the election of a new Supreme Judicial Council.

On the whole, Doncheva gives an unfavorable evaluation of the first steps of Boyko Borisov's cabinet, saying the government is more concerned with PR than with real reforms, which he cannot expect from her. According to Doncheva, the government has no potential, just as the inexperienced leadership of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs makes a deep impression. She is of the opinion that in the complex regional and international situation headed by the Foreign Ministry, there must be experienced diplomats, not people who have no experience on the international scene.

### **2.1.2.2. Recommendations**

ABV and Movement 21 need to strengthen their work in building up and strengthening

their party structures and be active in attracting new supporters and members to become the basis for a qualitative update of the party's assets. On the other hand, the two parties should make efforts to resume dialogue with BSP and strengthen real, not declarative, cooperation with other parties and organizations with a social-democratic profile.

### **2.1.3. «Bulgarian Social Democrats» Party**

#### **2.1.3.1. Condition**

After not taking part in the early parliamentary meetings held at the end of March, the party gave its support to Vessein Mareshki's «Volya», and during that quarter the Bulgarian Social Democrats did not show any presence in the political life of the country. In fact, there is no internal party life, party representatives have no media coverage, and the party site has long ceased to function. It would appear that the long-term participation in Coalition for Bulgaria has led to the deprivation of the party, which seems to be unable to maintain a normal party life.

#### **2.1.3.2. Recommendations**

The party must re-establish its internal party activity; it must strengthen its media presence; it must express positions on major political issues and the country's agenda; it must seek dialogue with other left-wing and social-democratic formations in order to implement meaningful and meaningful initiatives.

## **2.2. Center-right parties**

### **2.2.1. GERB**

After the victory in the parliamentary elections and the formation of the third government of Boyko Borisov, GERB is in

a consolidation phase. The success of the election intensifies the interest in the party by younger sympathizers and this leads to the expansion of membership, which was also reported by GERB Deputy Chairman Tsvetan Tsvetanov. The success of GERB in recent years is due to well structured local structures. The party is highly centralized and internally homogeneous, playing a major role in strong mobilization during elections.

In the past quarter GERB was mobilized to form the new government. The Party Parliamentary Group will play a decisive role in providing stable parliamentary support to the government in order to implement legislative initiatives and promised reforms.

At the opening of the 44th National Assembly Tsvetan Tsvetanov outlined the main priorities of the GERB parliamentary group. He said the main goal of the party would be for the government to spend a full four-year term of office. In his words, talks on coalition government take account of people's desire for center-right politics. Tsvetanov said he needed not only a political but also a public consensus on the priorities for the country. He has reassured the opposition that GERB's political profile is well-known and it is a guarantee that extreme forms of nationalism will not be allowed, but will follow a reasonable and pragmatic policy on the national priorities of the country. Tsvetanov pointed out as priorities for GERB the continuation of the judicial reform, the reform of education and raising teachers' salaries, as well as the reform of the health care system with the demonopolization of the Health Fund.

Dimitar Glavchev from GERB was elected as Speaker of the National Assembly. In the previous parliament he was the deputy of Tsetska Tsacheva. The party proposed that the Kardzhali MP Tsveta Karayancheva be

Deputy Chair of the National Assembly.

The chairman of the parliamentary group of GERB, just as in the last National Assembly will be Tsvetan Tsvetanov. The deputy chairs of the parliamentary group will be MPs Krasimir Velchev and Snezhana Dukova, and her secretary - Stanislav Ivanov.

After Bulgaria did not have an EU commissioner several months after Kristalina Georgieva left, the government proposed the GERB MEP Maria Gabriel for the vacancy. Gabriel, who previously had the family name Nedelcheva, has been an MEP for 10 years. She will occupy the area of «Digital Economy and Digital Society». After a successful hearing in the European Parliament, she is expected to take office officially next month.

### **2.2.2. Reformist Block**

After not making it to Parliament, the Reformist Block in practice is in a state of decay.

UDF leader Bozhidar Lukarski resigned as party Chairman. He said that he accepts it as his responsibility for the election defeat and the blame that the parties of the Reformist block did not find a way to unite the traditional right wing. Lukarski acknowledged that being in government with GERB had brought only disadvantages, since the Reformist block had taken only ministries in the most difficult and unreformed sectors. Lukarski is of the opinion that one should find a way for new right wing unification in the interest of the right wing voter, who has not been represented in the 44th National Assembly. In spite of the resignation, Lukarski was re-elected Chairman at the extraordinary National Conference of the UDF in the middle of May. The outcome of the election left UDF with no subsidy and, in addition, the party will have to give up its headquarters – the building it has used ever

since the beginning of the democratic change of this country – 134, Rakovski Street.

The leader of the Bulgaria of the Citizens Movement (BCM), Meglena Kouneva, also submitted her resignation and accepted the responsibility for the election defeat. She explained that, despite her resignation, she would remain closely involved with party operations. Until a new Chairman is elected the party decided for two of the young MPs in the previous legislature to share the position – Dimiter Delchev and Antoniy Trenchev. After the resignation of the leadership of the party, the processes of decay in BCM seem unstoppable. A number of representatives of the local structures left the party, and in the middle of May, even the newly elected Co-chairman left the party in the middle of May. The motives for his resignation were that there is mimicry in the party, not a real change, particularly after the decision to postpone the congress of BCM in spite the plans to hold it in June. Another significant person of BCM from the former legislature also left the party – Nestimir Ananiev – with motives very similar to those of Trenchev. The current events in the BCM indicate that the future of the party remains unclear – with no subsidy and no resources, the prospects are extremely negative.

The remaining parties from the Reformist Block are also in a very difficult state – BAPU and BNM.

### **2.2.3. DSB**

The loss of the election resulted in changes in DSB. The new project - New republic, involving DSB and other smaller right wing formations, which ran in the elections, demonstrated that it cannot be successful formula in this shape. Still, former DSB Chairman Radan Kunev voiced his

opinion that this project has to develop and be upgraded in the future in order to reach real right-centrist unification.

After the fiasco of the elections Radan Kunev resigned from the leadership of the party. His position was taken by Atanas Atanasov, former Deputy Chairman of the party and former Director of the Counterintelligence Service during the time of Ivan Kostov's government. Having resigned, Radan Kunev became Deputy Chairman of the party. A major competitor of Atanasov for the presidency of the party was Svetoslav Malinov MEP, who lost by only a couple of votes.

The election of Atanasov as DSB leader will hardly bring about any change in the party. He is part of the party status quo, has always supported the former leadership and has taken part in taking the major decisions in it. Many define Atanasov as a straightforward person, not very dialogical and capable of compromise. These qualities do not correspond to the goals of DSB – to find a way for unification with the other non-parliamentary right wing parties.

In one of his public appearances after his election as DSB Chairman, Atanasov attacked the Yes Bulgaria! party with Hristo Ivanov in the leading role, saying that they are where the reasons for the right-wing non-representation in parliament should be sought, because the initial idea had been for DSB and Yes, Bulgaria! to run together. Atanasov declared that his main goal would be to form a strong right wing alternative to GERB and the current government. He stated that in the short term he would work for DSB strengthening and for the preparation of the party for the forthcoming local elections.

The last reshuffle at the top of DSB demonstrated that there would be no real change in the party. DSB remains an introvert,

encapsulated party, with no clear strategy and vision for development. The outcome of the recent parliamentary elections showed that the party will continue losing electoral impact in the future too.

#### **2.2.4. “Yes, Bulgaria!”**

After the elections, “Yes, Bulgaria!” lost its focus and stays outside the scope of public attention. In spite of the good election result for a newly established political party, “Yes, Bulgaria!” faces many challenges. First, the party leadership with Hristo Ivanov at the top must concentrate their efforts on party action – establishing local party structures, attracting new supporters and membership, widening the scope of messages, finding dialogue with other parties and organizations with similar ideas. At this stage the impression remains, that “Yes, Bulgaria!” restricts itself to one-off initiatives related to appeals for judicial reforms, criticizing the status-quo, etc. which, however, do not result in an upgrade of the party in a structural or organizational aspect.

At the beginning of June, the Political Council of “Yes, Bulgaria!” promulgated a declaration repeating some of the priorities comprising the core of their recent pre-election campaign. The party declared as its paramount task the defense of the principles of the democratic legal state-rule of law, division of powers, independence of the judiciary, and guarantees for human rights. The party announced themselves as opposition to the current political status quo, represented in the 44th National Assembly, as well as the “fascistoid tendencies” in the parliamentary majority and the government. The party insists on guarantees for real participation in drafting the European agenda – a pro-active EC presidency and a clear vision for Bulgaria’s EU membership.

“Yes, Bulgaria” came out with a declaration condemning Andrey Navalny’s arrest in Russia. The declaration states that the party “joins the position of the EU condemning the mass violations of human rights by the authoritarian regime of Vladimir Putin and urges the Bulgarian government and President Radev to take a clear public position in the same direction.

### **2.3. Centrist Parties**

#### **2.3.1. MRF**

Despite DOST getting nearly 3% of the votes, the pre-term parliamentary elections were something of a victory for MRF, as the party demonstrated maximum mobilization and did not allow its main competitor for the votes of the Turkish minority to be represented in parliament.

It is obvious that MRF must reassess its political activities over the past years. The party has fallen into political isolation and it was seen during the campaign when the two main parties – GERB and BSP – categorically rejected the possibility of a coalition with MRF. The leadership of the party made an attempt to use the situation with the appearance of DOST and to brush up its image. MRF stated on many occasions that they were a nationally responsible party that defends Bulgarian national interest, unlike the party newly established by Lyutvi Mestan, criticized as a conduit of the interests of the Ankara regime.

Despite the efforts to improve its image, MRF was left in isolation and will be in opposition in this parliament too. At the opening session of the National Assembly in a declaration on behalf of the MRF parliamentary group Mustafa Karadayi stated that MRF will not support the government

due to extreme nationalists being part of it. In his words, the division of society and the language of hatred will destroy democracy, trust in the institutions and statehood as a whole in the long run. He believes that it is necessary to unite and bring back normality to politics and state governance. Karadayi is of the opinion that a new model of governance is required, as well as creating a majority based on values in order to guarantee security and stability of the country and a decent place in the Euro-Atlantic structures of which Bulgaria is a member. That model cannot be provided by a majority where nationalists who base their policy on fear and speech of hatred take part. Karadayi underscored the opportunities which the Bulgarian Presidency of the EC opens to this country. Therefore it is important to invest efforts into its successful realization.

The MRF parliamentary group will comprise 25 MPs. The whip will be the party leader Mustafa Karadayi, and deputy whips – Yordan Tsonev, Halil Letifov and Hamid Hamid, Adlen Shefked will be the secretary of the group.

Angel Isaev MP, who made it to Parliament due to the high number of preferential votes only because his ranking – 9, coincided with the number of the party ballot – 9 was expelled from the MRF parliamentary group after refusing to leave the parliament despite the leadership appeal for him to do so. In this way Isaev will be an independent MP and he stated that will support the government of GERB and the United Patriots.

### 2.3.2. DOST

Over the last quarter, DOST and its leader Lyutvi Mestan came out of the focus of the public eye. This was due to the defeat of the party in the elections. The only public

appearance of Mestan was immediately after the elections, when he insisted that they be declared null and void. Despite of the appeals of Mestan, no institution sent a request to the Constitutional Court for the annulment of the elections. Mestan stated that he would turn to the European Human Rights Court in Strasbourg.

In this quarter the tension between MRF and DOST was visible too. Thousands of activists of MRF booed their former leader Lyutvi Mestan in a rally marking the May events in 1989 in Dzhebel. Mestan defined that provocation and the MRF leadership, in their turn, called him a “traitor”. Later on, Mestan declared that he will request that the May events should be made part of the official holiday calendar in Bulgaria and that they should be marked at the appropriate state level because, to put it in his words, “the self-sacrifice and the example of the heroes of 1989 are not only for the natural rights of the Turkish and Muslim minorities, but for Bulgarian freedom and democracy.”

### 2.3.3. Volya (Will)

“Volya”, with businessman Veselin Mareshki as its leader formed a parliamentary group of 10 MPs. Much to the surprise of many people, Mareshki became one of the deputy Speakers of the National Assembly. The parliamentary group comprises unknown names, the majority of whom are employees of companies owned by Mareshki. As early as after the elections “Volya” expressed readiness to become part of the government with some representatives, but – as was to be expected - GERB did not invite them. Regardless of that, “Volya” supported the new government of Boyko Borisov when voting for the structure and the composition of the Council of Ministers in the Parliament.

In its first steps in the 44th National Assembly, “Volya” demonstrated some opportunism in their behavior. On the one hand, the party declared its support for the government, but on the other – they voted with the opposition in the failed attempt to impeach the Speaker of the National Assembly – Glavchev. This, however, seems to be a well thought-out strategy. In this way “Volya” proved in practice that it will have a decisive role in key votes and thus becomes a welcome partner for the parties in government, as well as for the opposition.

Prosecutor General Sotir Tsatsarov requested from the National Assembly to deprive Vesselin Mareshki of his MP immunity due to a currently ongoing court case for racketeering and inflicting injuries. Mareshki gave up his immunity himself, saying that it is in his interest for that matter to be closed as quickly as possible and that his name be cleared. He declared once again that he is innocent and that will be found so in court.

## **2.4. Nationalist Parties**

### **2.4.1. United Patriots**

With United Patriots being part of the third government of Boyko Borisov, it is for the first time in the most recent history of this country that nationalist formations officially have become part of the government. The first GERB and Boyko Borisov government was supported by “Ataka” at the beginning of the term of office. In the previous National Assembly the Patriotic Front, comprising NFSB and VMRO, supported the cabinet without being part of it with ministers. Now, the United Patriots are an official partner of GERB in the government with their representatives in the central power at the level of ministers, deputy ministers, regional governors and

leaders of national agencies.

Involving Valeri Simeonov and Krasimir Karakachanov as Deputy Prime Ministers aims at clearer engagement of the United Patriots with the government, the goal being more stability of the governance from the point of view of relations between coalition partners. Boyko Borisov followed a similar strategy in his relations with the Reformist Block in the previous term of office, when the leaders of the various parties became government ministers. Unlike the Reformist Block, Borisov had regarded the United Partners as a more predictable partner in his previous government and this is why now the expectations are to have synchronized and uniform action between the two political forces, at least during the first half of the term of office.

The Parliamentary group of the United Patriots comprises 24 MPs. After the leaders of VMRO and NFSB became part of the government, the leader of “Ataka” Volen Siderov became the whip. His deputies will be Valentin Kasabov and Iskren Veselinov, and Boris Yachev, Desislav Chukolov and Yulian Angelov will be secretaries.

Despite the expectations of serious reaction on the part of the EPP with regard to the participation of nationalists in the GERB government, no official critical reaction followed, and Boyko Borisov himself denied any criticism on that topic being voiced during his meetings abroad. His words were that this issue was not even raised by his European partners. The only letter that became public was the reply of Manfred Weber to Petar Korumbashev MEP (BSP), stating that EPP has always defended European values and does not accept partnership with nationalists. GERB disregarded the letter, saying that it was a manipulation and insinuation on



the part of the opposition. Manfred Weber himself explained on Twitter saying that he “sharply condemns any manipulations of his words”, adding that Boyko Borisov and his government are working for “a good reputation and stability in Bulgaria”.

Regardless of that, the criticism of the opposition and the intellectual circles in Bulgaria aimed at the participation of the United Patriots in the government is still ongoing. Concerns were voiced that the participation of the United Patriots in the government during Bulgaria’s EC Presidency will undermine the confidence of the other member states in Bulgaria and will in no way work in the interest of the positive image of the country. The concerns are that the United Patriots are an unpredictable partner and could create additional problems during the Presidency.

The United Patriots came up with two Regional Governors – of the Sofia Metropolitan Area and Sofia – Region. Former “Ataka” MP Nikolay Pehlivanov became Regional Governor of Sofia Metropolitan and his party fellow Iliyan Todorov became Governor of Sofia Region.

The new regional governor of Sofia Region proposed to the President to rename Musala Summit to St. Ivan Rilski with the motive that the name of the summit is of Turkish-Arab linguistic origin. A similar proposal for changing the name of the highest summit on the Balkan Peninsula was submitted on several occasions to President Plevneliev during his term of office, but was rejected. This shows that in the future too, the United Patriots will focus their attention on typically national-populist initiatives.

## **2.5. Positions of the Parties on Foreign and European Policy**

A positive trend after the elections is

that the main parties in this country unite around the idea of the importance of this country’s Presidency of the EU Council in 2018. There is consensus among the political parties on that. There are still discussions going on regarding the priorities of the presidency. Strengthening regional and economic cooperation, as well as the EU integration of the Western Balkans are priorities around which all political parties stand united, at this stage.

There are some nuances regarding President Radev’s invitation to Putin to visit this country on the occasion of the 140th anniversary of Bulgaria’s Liberation. The non-parliamentary right wing parties declared themselves against this idea, whereas the parliamentary represented parties seemed to approve of it.

## **3. Public Opinion**

A Gallup poll, carried out at the beginning of May, indicates that the third Boyko Borisov government started its term with 32% confidence. They had a similar percentage of confidence in the government during their previous term of office. Lack of confidence is at 55% for the time being, and is slightly lower than usual over the past year, which was over 60%. The 44th National Assembly started with 24% confidence and 66% lack of confidence, which demonstrates that Parliament remains one of the least approved institutions in this country.

Gallup’s poll researches also the levels of optimism and the expectations of the people for the development of this country. 30% of the respondents are optimistic for the direction this country is going in and 53% express pessimism. Although it is the tradition for pessimism to prevail, in recent months there has been a certain upward

trend in the positive assessments.

#### 4. Main Conclusions and Forecasts

1. The new government of GERB and the United Patriots seems stable at this stage. The participation of two of the Co-Chairmen of the Patriots in the Cabinet is a guarantee for their close involvement in the governance of this country. At this stage, there are no significant negative reactions in Europe for nationalists' participation in the government. The foreign political activity of Prime Minister Borisov shows that in his third term of office he will try to strengthen his role on the international scene – particularly in the context of the situation on the Balkans and the tense relations between the EU and Turkey. This activity is related to the forthcoming EC Presidency of Bulgaria next year. Actually, this will be one of the focuses of the efforts of the government in the coming months. The presidency is an exceptional opportunity for Bulgaria to strengthen its role at a European level, and present itself in positive light.

2. With their first actions in Parliament BSP showed that they would want to be strong opposition, which the government would have to take into consideration. Proof of that was the demand for a resignation of the Speaker of the National Assembly.

Kornelia Ninova continues the renewal of the party showing hardness and a consistent approach as regards the future development of the party. However, at the same time, the negative attitudes among some of the party activists who had been in leading positions before have become stronger. For Ninova it is important to strike a balance between dialogue and the change she wants to achieve, otherwise internal turbulence among the leading elite of the party is possible.

3. The other smaller parties in the left

spectrum who were left outside parliament – ABV, Movement 21 and Party of Bulgarian Social Democrats remained in the periphery of public attention. They lack political initiatives on issues of importance to this country. It is necessary to set the emphasis on the work inside the parties and on developing their local structures. In order for them to have a future, it is also important to restart the dialogue with BSP in the left sphere of the political and find ways for common political initiatives.

4. After the electoral victory GERB is consolidated as a party. All the resources of the party and its parliamentary group are focused on guaranteeing stability of government and support for legislative reform and priorities of the government. The party has carefully divided its resources – in executive authorities, as well as in parliament. The main government level and capacity of GERB in the executive have been kept, the majority of the ministers from the previous governments of Boyko Borisov kept their line responsibilities, which guarantees continuity. Despite the appearance of some new faces in the parliamentary group of the party, the presence and the role of Tsvetan Tsvetanov is an important factor for the closeness and discipline in the group for providing parliamentary support to the government and for legislative initiative that are important to the party.

5. Many of the non-parliamentary parties from the right wing are becoming more and more disintegrated. The intentions and the calls for unity have been going on for years but remain just declarations. The mutual accusations for the failure in the parliamentary elections are still overwhelming, which is the main obstacle to maintaining normal and honest dialogue between the parties. With the election of a new Chairman in DSB –

Atanas Atanasov, the status quo in the party prevailed and it will be very difficult for it to part with the encapsulation they have put themselves in over the past years. BCM is also in a severe crisis. UDF reelected Lukarski as a leader but there is a lack of ideas there too. The new formation of Hristo Ivanov "Yes, Bulgaria!" still behaves like a pressure group with a priority on judicial reform, rather than a party covering the whole spectrum of political messages. The party has no clear position on many issues.

6. MRF positioned itself as opposition to the government, because of the participation of nationalists in the latter. DOST remains the main opponent of MRF. After not managing to overcome the election barrier, it vanished from the public space. This will be used by MRF in order to restore the support among the Turkish minority in this country and the emigrants to Turkey the majority of whom voted in favor of DOST. MRF still faces the image dilemma related to the participation of Dilyan Peevski in their parliamentary group. The competition with DOST was used by the party to show itself as a nationally responsible

party defending Bulgarian national interest, and not the interest of foreign countries, which DOST are accused of.

7. "Volya" led by businessman Veselin Mareshki is a new formation with no political experience. The party supported the cabinet when it was voted but it supported the opposition too, when they demanded the resignation of the Speaker of the National Assembly Dimiter Glavchev. These actions of Volya show that the party will try and show the government and the opposition alike that it might have a decisive role in certain votes, despite its mere 10 MPs.

8. With involving United Patriots in the government of Boyko Borisov it is the first time that nationalists in Bulgaria have officially become part of the government. Although they are trying to demonstrate an improved image and more moderation, the United Patriots might deliver some surprises. At this stage at least, it seems that they will be firm in their support for the government, even more so, now that Valeri Simeonov and Krasimir Karakachanov are Deputy Prime Ministers.

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