

DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

POLIT-BAROMETER

Year 22 Issue 9
3rd – 31st October

Boris Popivanov



The new Bulgarian parliament has begun work without a real dialogue between the parties about the priorities of a regular government.



The dividing line between “status quo” and “change” no longer forms the structure of the political process.



The debate on the membership of the Eurozone and Schengen includes the danger of a Eurosceptic wave.

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1

THE DYNAMICS OF FOREIGN POLICY

The war in Ukraine. The topic remains dominant for the foreign policy messages of the institutions and parties. It is unfolding in two dimensions: an attitude towards the war itself and an attitude towards the side effects of the war.

In the first aspect, the main dividing line is the provision of arms to Ukraine. One point of view is traditionally advocated by President Rumen Radev. The negative attitude of the head of state towards possible arms deliveries is increasingly enriched with new arguments. According to Radev, weapons for Ukraine means involving Bulgaria in the war, but this also has a wider context. Radev opposes Ukraine's accelerated NATO membership with the same motive, but scaled up to the level of NATO: drawing NATO into a war with Russia. The problem has become a reason for increasing criticism of the President's domestic political opponents. He already openly talks about the "warmongers" in Bulgaria, who do not realise the consequences, but are ready to transfer them to the Bulgarian people. The issue of reinsurance also appears. Defense Minister Dimitar Stoyanov, who is close to Radev, claims that there is no weaponry to be sent to Ukraine even if a decision is made about it. Hence the call for the debate on Ukraine to serve as an incentive for arming the Bulgarian army and especially the Bulgarian Air Force. The purchase of new fighters and the engagement of "replacement" fighters are on the agenda. Radev's opponents, for their part, emphasise the symbolic moment in the issue of weapons. Such a decision of the National Assembly, according to them, would eliminate doubts about Bulgaria's geopolitical loyalty to the West. The debates of the parliamentary parties against the presence of the Russian ambassador in Sofia Eleonora Mitrofanova at the official opening of the parliament, as well as the invitation to the Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky to speak to 9 Bulgarian MPs, have a symbolic character, although this is, to a certain extent, provincialised.

In the second aspect, the President again plays a leading role. He has managed to force the subject of the effects of war to be considered primarily through the prism of the effects on energy. Encouraged probably

by the achievements of his office in the field of diversification of gas supplies, as well as by the specific success with the Bulgaria-Greece gas interconnector, Radev shows increasing international activity in this field. The President's meetings with his Moldovan counterpart Maya Sandu in Chisinau and with US Assistant Secretary of State for Energy Jeffrey Payatt in Sofia are oriented towards continued diversification. On a European level, Radev seeks to present the solutions to the energy crisis as the key to the social and economic problems of the EU in the coming months. His messages in this direction were heard at the meetings of the European Council in Prague and Brussels. Radev is making efforts to move in the same context another important topic of his foreign policy, Bulgaria's membership in the Schengen area. After the European Parliament had supported Bulgarian membership and after the Parliament of the Netherlands had rejected it, Radev began to link the issue to the imperatives facing the EU in the context of geopolitical tensions with Russia: better energy connectivity of the Union, better protection of its external borders, less economic costs and easier transfers. The presumption of the Bulgarian President is that Schengen is not so much a terrain for a clash of national considerations as a tool for European unity.

Membership in the Eurozone. The caretaker cabinet took a clear course towards the realisation of Bulgarian membership in the Eurozone in the optimally short period until January 1st, 2024. This is presented as a further step towards the full integration of Bulgaria into Europe. Some parties in the country, such as GERB, adopted this goal in a geopolitical sense. According to them, adopting the euro would mean effective Euro-Atlanticism. Domestic political resistance, however, at this very moment is turning out to be unexpectedly strong. Among the parties, first "Vazrazhdane" ("Revival") and then the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), together with a number of media and many commentators, talked about the risks of severe financial and economic consequences for Bulgaria upon entering the Eurozone. Parliamentary debate on the subject raised the stakes and instilled a sense of conspiracy. The Bulgarian National

Bank and its experts were alleged to be hiding essential information about the negative effects of the euro. There was also the suspicion that it was lobbying pressure on Bulgaria by external forces. The national referendum proposed by "Vazrazhdane"

shows that the membership of the Eurozone will be a field of serious political confrontation, mainly with nationalist arguments, and that this will activate in a new way the debate about the benefits and harm of the EU membership in general.

2

THE INSTITUTIONS AND THE AGENDA OF SOCIETY

The government. The “Donev” cabinet entered the untraditional, but increasingly common situation of a caretaker government, which governs under the conditions of a functioning parliament and can introduce bills. The first big political intrigue of the day is whether the new 48th National Assembly will succeed in electing a regular government, or whether new pre-term elections will be held at the beginning of spring. The second major intrigue, however, has to do with the laws required under the Recovery and Resilience Plan. Prepared by the cabinet, they represent a test for political parties. If they refuse to consider them, it could be seen as nationally irresponsible, as a failure of national efforts to obtain EU funding. If the parties pass these laws in an accelerated order, this could be entered as an asset in the account of the cabinet - and therefore of the President who formed it.

This game with parliament takes on even more complex dimensions because of the problem of the state budget. It is obvious that the cabinet does not want to commit to a new budget. After three different options, in the end the Ministry of Finance simply proposed an extension of the term of the current budget. Perhaps a certain role in this decision is played by the belief that at a later stage any budget will become a possibility for political accusations of incompetence. If the caretaker cabinet proposes its budget and the parliament passes it, whatever amendments it makes to it, then the parties will be able to blame that cabinet - and the President along with it - for all the social and economic difficulties to come. An extension of the current budget, which is the budget of the previous majority of the “We Continue the Change” (“Pro-dulzhavame Promianata”- PP) party, could in turn be used against that party with a similar argument.

The cabinet is clearly counting on being able to maintain a positive public image because of the results of its top priority, energy. At the beginning of the mandate, this was announced as the number one topic. Now Prime Minister Galab Donev and his ministers can boast of falling natural gas prices, control of electricity prices and guaranteed gas supplies.

The President. The head of state is purposefully delaying the procedure of handing over mandates for forming a government. His motives seem logical - to allow more time for the parties to agree on a majority, but also to pass certain important laws. At the same time, this is more time for the tensions and scandals between the parties, a lamentable expression of which was the unprecedented three-day election of the Speaker of the National Assembly. Undoubtedly, Rumen Radev is in a strong position regarding parliament. The unconvincing start of this National Assembly allows the President to constantly remind the MPs of what is expected of them – in both a constitutional and a public sense. Unlike last year, however, the parties are not in a position to boycott Radev. They are forced to comply with him because their public image in government negotiations depends to a large extent on his decisions. Moreover, if the first two mandates fail to lead to a regular cabinet, Radev’s role in the third mandate will again be a leading one. That is why two hypotheses are starting to circulate: that Radev will be the architect of a new government through a mandate for the “Bulgarian Rise” (“Bulgarski Vuzhod”- BV) party of former Prime Minister Stefan Yanev; and that Radev will fail to form a cabinet through a mandate for BSP.

The real risk of yet more pre-term elections has finally formalised the rhetoric of a “presidential republic”. There are already warnings from various political circles that Radev is preparing for long-term rule and is covertly fostering the crisis of parliamentarism. There is discussion of claims that there are not one, but two “presidential” parties in Bulgaria: BV in the National Assembly and “There is Such a People” (“Ima Takuv Narod” - ITN) outside it. An interview of MEP Ivo Hristov, where the presidential republic was mentioned as a way out of the political crisis in the country, gained importance. Hristov’s closeness to Radev further fuelled rumours about the head of state’s grand political ambitions.

The Chief Prosecutor. The hyperactivity of the Chief Prosecutor has continued for another month. After two years of justifications and answers to accusations,

Ivan Geshev has boldly counterattacked in several directions. First, he has presented himself as the main defender of justice in Bulgaria, and almost as if he is the only one, thereby exploiting the public feeling of a lack of justice. Second, Geshev is doing what he can to wrest the debate on judicial reform from his opponents. In his letters to the newly elected 240 people's representatives and in the meetings requested with the parliamentary groups, the Chief Prosecutor has touched on this issue, blurring it into dozens of larger and smaller legislative proposals. Third, Geshev is trying to adopt certain geopolitical and ide-

logical coordinates. His deputy Borislav Sarafov in an interview of his pointed out that Geshev was the main enemy of Russia, and Geshev in his own interview clarified that true anti-communists support his march in defence of justice. All this is in principle the behaviour of a political party, not a state institution, but it would probably be hasty to make a conclusion about Geshev's future political project. Rather, he is seeking to participate in the political debate from such a position and exert influence on its behalf, without being "tailored" to any particular political camps, as has hitherto been the case.

3

THE CONDITION OF THE PARTY SYSTEM

GERB-UDF. The first place in the elections burdened GERB with the greatest responsibility for the fate of the 48th National Assembly and the formation of a regular cabinet. GERB were the most critical opposition of the previous majority both during the previous parliament and in the election campaign. In the days following the vote on October 2nd, the other parties took a wait-and-see position. The impression was created that they prefer GERB to hold the political initiative, and for others to criticise them and point out their mistakes.

In general, it can be said that GERB are pursuing three main goals in the post-election situation. The first is to extricate themselves from the political isolation they have been in for the past year and a half as an emblem of the “status quo”, “stagnation” and “corruption”. In other words, GERB must overcome the image of a “toxic party” that no one wants to interact with, as their PP opponents designated them. The second goal is to achieve “Euro-Atlantic legitimisation” of the party, so that they are not attacked as insufficiently “Western” or even covertly “pro-Russian”. This implies an understanding with at least some of the forces in Bulgarian society and politics perceived as “Euro-Atlantic”. And the third goal, although not announced publicly, is the acceptance of the leading role of the leader Boyko Borisov in the political process from now on. The issue here is to overcome suggestions that GERB only have a future if they retire their leader and start afresh. There are no signs that forming a cabinet in this parliament is a primary goal of GERB. Rather, it is a possible step after the achievement of the three main objectives.

Undoubtedly, there has been progress in getting out of isolation. GERB failed to impose their original candidate for Speaker of the National Assembly, Rosen Zhelyazkov, but gathered a majority behind their second candidate, Vezhdi Rashidov. Rashidov was also supported by the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF), BSP and BV. They later justified themselves by saying that they had made a compromise to avoid a constitutional crisis, and that they stood in principle behind the oldest member of parliament, who hap-

pened to be from GERB. However, the fact remains that an MP from GERB was head of the parliament. Further, the first weeks of the new parliament have outlined four topics that have caused division between the parties. These are the following issues: whether to adopt a new budget or extend the old one; to provide arms to Ukraine or to stick to the previous “humanitarian” position; to adopt the euro as the national currency after one year or to postpone; to introduce a paper ballot in elections or to retain fully machine voting. Few paid attention to the fact that, on all four topics, GERB joined “thematic majorities”. In all four cases, GERB have supported the decision for which there has rather been a majority in the National Assembly. Although unrecognised, it is a success that shows the ability of the party to take advantage of the complex parliamentary configuration. From the point of view of party interactions, there are two parties (MRF and BV) that do not reject the idea of a governing coalition with GERB. This is not enough for a majority, but it definitely points to an expansion the perimeter of influence of the party.

Euro-Atlantic legitimation is the subject of focused efforts. GERB used their media resources to create the impression on a daily basis that the onus for a coalition lies with the other “Euro-Atlantic parties”, PP and Democratic Bulgaria (DB), who have no choice but to cooperate with GERB if they really want to preserve the geopolitical orientation of Bulgaria. Tactically, GERB tried to absolve themselves of responsibility further by airing a “contact group” for government talks. The “contact group” itself is an absurd solution because it cannot speak on behalf of any party and cannot make any commitments. Its participants - former President Rosen Plevneliev and former foreign minister Solomon Passy - reinforce the impression of a frivolous attitude. But both have a clearly-stated “Euro-Atlantic” profile and cannot be contested along geopolitical lines. GERB, last but not least, decided to demonstrate geopolitical loyalties to a greater degree than anyone else. They not only supported the idea of providing arms to Ukraine, but also insisted that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky be invited to speak before the Bulgarian parliament. Borisov

chose to deliver some of his most important messages from Munich, from the congress of the Christian Social Union, where he was a guest, to emphasise once again the external support he enjoys. All these are half-hearted results if PP and/or DB are not drawn to general government, but they set the framework for debate in which PP and DB will not only have to attack, but also justify themselves.

The delicate topic of Borisov's political future remains unresolved. To the greatest extent, this tempts GERB to have new pre-term elections, in the hope that Borisov's leading participation would then stop causing tension. Borisov could accept an expert government in which not only he, but also the other leaders would stand on the sidelines, but it would be much more difficult for him to agree to a political government in which the rest of the GERB figures would not be directly subordinate to him. In the end, it becomes clear that Borisov's unconditional authority in the country is already a thing of the past. His control of power could only happen institutionally, through a stable majority, not just informally and behind the scenes, through influence and pressure.

"We continue the change" ("Produlzhavame Pro-mianata"- PP). The party line appears to have been clarified almost immediately after the October 2nd vote. It rests on an acute opposition to GERB. Analysis of the election campaign probably led PP to the conclusion that the confrontation with GERB prevented the electoral decline of the former ruling party. Therefore, it is in their interest to maintain the impression that the main axis of Bulgarian politics is GERB-PP. This means either a course for new pre-term elections to return to first place (due to the failure of GERB to form a cabinet first) or fierce opposition in this parliament (so that GERB should soon fail as rulers and the responsibility would weigh entirely on them).

PP are working hard on their centrist image, open to voters across the political spectrum. Their approach to the right is based on the fight against corruption. The choice of Vezhdi Rashidov, known for his dubious appearances since the end of the 20th century, fuelled the PP theme of behind-the-scenes and old players, who should already be removed. The phrase of the former Prime Minister and PP leader Kiril Petkov "the time of transition has returned" points in this direction. In such a way, any alternative appearance of DB in support of GERB, even the most modest, would be compromised as getting bogged down in the corrupt past. The approach of PP to the left, in turn, is dominated by the obvious ambition to appropriate the terrain of social policy. More than half of the public messages of PP refer to income, pensions and benefits. There has already been media commentary that PP are the new progressive "left-wing" party to replace BSP. Actually, the social accents of PP are far from the overall vision of the modern left wing,

but they undoubtedly make an impression. However, never before has a leading party, other than BSP, raised social issues as a priority. For this reason, PP are deliberately fuelling their tension with BSP - not only to push them out of their electoral niche, but also to push them politically towards an understanding with GERB and thus further compromise them.

Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF). The desire for direct participation in executive power was stated by MRF even before the campaign. The post-election situation simply confirms this. It also confirms the belief of the party that this participation could only happen in an alliance with GERB. The separate political moves of MRF - the allocation of parliamentary committees, the support for Vezhdi Rashidov, the consultations with the "contact group" and the criticism of PP - clearly lead in this direction. It is likely that MRF also have non-public resources to influence GERB. But the fact remains that their party strategy, at least for the moment, depends on the intentions and capabilities of another party.

"Vazrazhdane" ("Revival"). The party are completely relying on radical populist behaviour. They are wary of formulating their own grand goals, which could alienate their disparate current and potential supporters. Instead, they actively exploit the agenda of the cabinet and other parties to expose them as "anti-national". Here are two examples. "Vazrazhdane" are challenging not just the laws under the Recovery and Resilience Plan, but the Plan itself, demanding that a new one be negotiated to stop liberalisation of the market. "Vazrazhdane" also reject not just the deadlines for the adoption of the euro, but the euro itself, and propose that there be a national referendum on the subject. The party are determined to push for more pre-term elections, in the hope that the ongoing political and social instability will significantly expand their influence. However, in order not to be seen as a destructive call for "elections to the bitter end", the party presents it as a geopolitical salvation. According to their estimates, in the current parliament, a coalition could only be formed as a "Euro-Atlantic" one. Euro-Atlanticism, however, means war, and this coalition would push Bulgaria towards participating in the war in Ukraine. Therefore, keeping the peace means having no government and moving towards elections.

In the complex dividing lines between seven parties in the National Assembly, it is difficult to position yourself as an alternative to the status quo. "Vazrazhdane" are trying to achieve this effect through the method popularised by previous nationalist parties. This is the method of scandal. The press conference, at which journalists were expelled, quite expectedly provoked violent reactions and even ideas for a media boycott of the party. Just such a conflict with journalists would stimulate the negative media background necessary for the suggestion of being "alone against everyone".

The Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP). The party once again, after another electoral defeat, bring to the fore the thesis of their “national responsibility”, which implies the formation of a regular government. For the team of chairwoman Korneliya Ninova, this looks like political time-buying. The plenum of the National Council, which took place a week after the October 2nd vote, was indicative of the changing sentiments among the active party. Ninova made a serious effort to convey that she would not allow herself to be called to account at any cost. The previous day, the new Parliamentary Group of BSP elected Ninova as chair, in order to predetermine her remaining at the head of the party. Some opposition members were not admitted to the plenum itself, which also showed a reluctance to make any concessions. Nevertheless, Ninova prevailed by a very slim majority of the quorum. It is clear that from now on she will not be able to rely unconditionally on “her” National Council. The decision to convene the congress on February 12th is an expression of political calculation. If there is then a regular government, Ninova will seek to support it and to create for herself the resources of power with which to maintain a congressional victory. If no regular government is formed, February will probably be the time of the election campaign, and therefore a change of party leader will be off the agenda.

The political survival of the party leadership passes through the actively planted image of a “victim of enemies”. The plot is unfolding in several directions. First in the line of enemies is the caretaker cabinet, which interferes in the internal affairs of the party and violates the principle of separation of powers. It turns out that any criticism against the policy of the leadership, even from party members, is a violation of the Constitution. The prosecutor’s office is also an enemy because of its investigation, which Ninova presented as pressure against the party and refused to comply with it, even at the cost of breaking the law. Yet another enemy is machine voting, which, according to BSP accounts, scared 150,000 party sympathisers away from voting for the socialists. One more enemy is also former partner PP, who were ardently supported by BSP during the election campaign, but are now vehemently accused of “stealing” the platform of the party.

There are indications that, in the current parliamentary configuration, the leadership of BSP is making timid attempts to orientate itself towards GERB. The tension with PP is decisively accentuated. The support of BSP for the election of Vezhdi Rashidov as head of the National Assembly is of indisputable importance. This support was propagandistically portrayed as saving “parliamentary democracy”, rather than as a party vote. But it is precisely the argument for “parliamentary democracy” that may prove to be a feeler for the steps to come. The most consistent strategic line of the party leadership is the conflict with President Radev. The dilemma “parliamentary democracy or presidential republic” is drawn.

In this way, firstly, any action in parliament, however unpopular or unprincipled, can be explained as a defence of “parliamentary democracy”, and secondly, allies can be sought for an “anti-presidential” coalition.

At the same time, the erosion of the BSP is deepening. By all accounts, Ninova’s team will try to limit her by re-ideologising, by launching a new party programme, but there is no theoretical capacity or credibility to be seen for such a tactic to be effective. The substantial distancing of the largest party organisation, that in Sofia, from the national leadership should not be underestimated. The increasingly active involvement of the former president of the Party of European Socialists, Sergey Stanishev, in the life of the party is also taking on an important role. The increasing national authority of the caretaker Minister of Justice, Krum Zarkov should also be noted, who has clearly declared himself as an alternative to the current leadership, but is gathering support not with criticism, but with the results achieved in the executive branch.

“Democratic Bulgaria” (DB). From the beginning, the formation has displayed greater constructiveness than PP. One of the versions which they directly and indirectly promote places the key to a future regular government precisely in the hands of DB. On the one hand, DB show loyalty to PP. In the first vote for Speaker of the Parliament, DB supported the PP candidate Nikola Minchev. Like PP, DB refused to meet with the Plevneliev-Passi “contact group”. On the other hand, DB, unlike PP, have not completely closed the door to GERB, and, what is more, they have constantly declared that they want a regular government in this mandate and are ready to participate in it. DB give the “Euro-Atlantic” imperative in the conditions of crisis and international tension much more weight than PP do. However, the statements of the leaders of DB are contradictory and hint at hesitation, rather than clear intentions. It seems as though their hope is to arrive at an acceptable governing formula that they can support, not coalition talks. The price of agreeing to GERB would be too high. But GERB’s pressure on them, based on their “Euro-Atlantic” responsibility, is too worrying.

“Bulgarian Rise” (Bulgarski Vuzhod” - BV). The party of former Prime Minister Stefan Yanev continues to radiate the maximum possible cooperation. BV do not reject any coalition *a priori*, do not express scepticism towards any other party, nor do they refuse any meeting. Moreover, they actively support the scenario according to which the chance of a government in this parliament could only be realised if they get the third mandate to form a cabinet. The role of a political mediator has not only advantages but also disadvantages. BV are regularly attacked as a “presidential project” or a “crutch of the oligarchy”. It is true that BV are the only party in parliament that make an effort to talk

about ideology and emphasise “national conservatism” as their credo. However, this seems like an effort to save an increasingly unconvincing political image. The leader Stefan Yanev gained political popularity as the Prime Minister who put an end to the “GERB model” in the governance of the country - and now this same Yanev supports the GERB candidate for the

Speaker of the National Assembly Rosen Zhelyazkov. Yanev’s party arose to legitimise his moderate political stance on the war in Ukraine - and now the same party is declaring itself to be in favour of providing arms to Ukraine. These turns in political behaviour multiply doubts as to whether this is a long-term project with its own identity.

4

MAIN CONCLUSIONS AND FORECASTS

The development of the events related to the war in Ukraine is being carefully monitored by the Bulgarian political elite, and is used for internal political purposes. For the second time in 2022, the issue of providing weapons to Ukraine will enter the agenda of the National Assembly. Now, unlike May, it is likely that this issue will be resolved positively. If, however, a regular cabinet is not formed to continue and deepen the adopted line, such a resolution would be truly symbolic. If there were pre-term elections, this would mean that the decision should be carried out by a caretaker cabinet, which already has a negative attitude, and has already declared that there are, in fact, no weapons. But even a regular cabinet could hardly come to an understanding for much more substantial support.

The Eurozone is turning out to be a far bigger bone of contention. There is potential for political and social confrontation, for manipulation and fake news. What is more, the adoption of the euro could easily serve as a subject to fan Euroscepticism. Anti-European sentiments can be fuelled by various parties, not just “Vazrazhdane”, but even by BSP, under the plausible pretext that it is not about the EU, but only about its currency. The Schengen issue also charged with anti-European feelings. The starting position is different, but the final result may coincide. In the case of the Eurozone, membership can be manipulatively propogandised as external pressure, foreign to Bulgarian interests. In the case of Schengen, the refusal of membership can be presented as disregard for the Bulgarian interest. The notion of sovereignty embodied in the Bulgarian lev and the image of the haughtily slammed Schengen door pose the risk that many eyes might turn to the East, at a time when Europe needs to strengthen its unity more than ever. This would be geopolitical short-sightedness on the part of the European leaders, which can hardly be compensated by their respect for the pre-election manoeuvres of parties in the Netherlands.

The post-election situation in Bulgaria testifies to severe political fragmentation. In some ways, things look more worrisome than 2021, because there are no longer distinct blocs of “status quo” and “change”. On the contrary, the closest association is with the

Hobbesian war of each against each. The “false start” of the new parliament, which could not even be constituted within three days, is indicative of this. The scenario of new pre-term elections is entirely realistic, although this is not predetermined. It would seem as though most of the parties would easily agree to new elections if they could avoid public responsibility for this. This striving to escape responsibility, in the meantime, encourages all institutional improvisations. It should be noted that, despite the serious electoral defeats that some parties suffered on October 2nd, nowhere and in no party did the leaderships resign this time (even though they were formally submitted, just to be rejected). It is logical that as long as party power remains guaranteed, there will be an increase in the temptations to play with less responsibility.

The greatest expectations for forming a government are concentrated around GERB. The party are doing what they can to redirect expectations, but there is no way they can entirely successful. Therefore, if we come to the forming of a cabinet, the most likely option remains some form of expert government dominated by GERB. The business card of this cabinet could include “Euro-Atlanticism” and “national salvation”, and why not “defence of parliamentarism”. The question of which participants would be possible in such a cabinet is more complicated. There are many variants. Most advantageous for the parties would probably be a “supermajority cabinet” in which everyone apart from “Vazrazhdane” is present, and in which everyone justifies their compromises with the compromises of everyone else. However, the structure would be too cumbersome to last long. A “minority cabinet” would emphasise the responsibility of GERB, but would require unattainable skills of swimming in the sea of “thematic majorities” to survive. Rumours of extra-party pressure for a government should also be taken into account. In one of the varieties, there is talk of pressure from abroad, which presupposes the inclusion of PP or DB in the government. In the other variety, the focus is on pressure from big capital, which probably presupposes the involvement of MRF and BV. Once again, however, there is a lack of clear political direction, because the Bulgarian parties have

already proven their ability to present both international partners and big capital a *fait accompli*.

We cannot work out a forecast for a new government in this sense. At this stage, it can only be argued that the prerequisites for any formula for a new government are not yet in place. It could be calculated that with the political pace imposed by the President, if a regular cabinet turns out not to be possible, new elections would take place not at the end of winter, but at the beginning of spring.

The importance of the President in the political crisis is taking on more and more weight. The permanent parliamentary deadlock will increasingly push this institution forward. However, let us not forget that, un-

like before, President has virtually no party support. On the contrary, his isolation from the parties may at some point turn out to be a negative factor for his political prospects.

The political agenda is concerned with topics such as government negotiations, Eurozone membership and a presidential republic. It is hardly noticeable that social and economic issues remain in the shadows, except somewhat in the slogans of those in the former ruling party, PP. An adequate strategy for the development of the country in the face of highly pronounced crisis tendencies is practically not debated. The crisis in the Socialist Party is becoming a problem not only for the party and its supporters, but as a whole for the Bulgarian social and economic model.

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