



Georgi Karasimeonov, Milen Lyubenov (Eds.)

BAROMETER

Political Parties Development in Bulgaria

Vol.11 Issue 1
January – March 2011

■ The political situation till the end of the current year will be determined mainly by the upcoming local and presidential elections due to take place this coming fall. The rising inflation and unemployment rates will be in the focus of the election debate and the opposition will inevitably avail of them as an argument against the governing majority. The succession of rows, which have been raging in the media since the beginning of the year, indicates that the election campaign will be shrill and full of compromising materials.

■ The rows surrounding the GERB Party brought about the declining support rating of the party. For the time being, Prime Minister Borissov has managed to subdue the attacks against his government, and by tabling a motion for a winning confidence vote in Parliament he succeeded in preventing a political crisis. The re-shuffles carried out in the leadership of the GERB parliamentary faction indicate that some shifts have taken place in the power play between the influential groups in the party.

■ The intensified populist and radical initiatives of the Attack Party indicate that its general strategy has been modified on the eve of the upcoming elections. Volen Siderov's party will put its stakes on an aggressive campaign, which will further exacerbate the political debate in the country. This strategy, however, is hardly likely to prove effective, because Attack's overall conduct manifests that it is part and parcel of the governance of the country, although the party has no official representatives in any of the governmental institutions.

■ For the time being, the outflow of GERB voters has not been transformed into support for the Blue Coalition. Both the UDF and DSB enjoy stable electoral positions, but they still lack the necessary electoral resources, which could make it possible for them to get broader support for their aspiration to head the country's governance. This is the reason why the Blue Coalition will be trying to expand its format by attempting to unite some of the other traditional right-wing parties around itself, as this year's local and presidential elections open up a favorable opportunity for setting up precisely such a broader coalition.

■ The rows engulfing GERB and the economic situation in the country marked by rising inflation and unemployment rates stabilized the public support, which the BSP has been enjoying of late. The party seems to have overcome the painful electoral defeat at the 2009 general election and it is currently making increasingly louder claims addressed to the country's government. The organized social protests indicate that the BSP has been attempting to take control over this social discontent and transform it into political demands addressed to the country's governance.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. The Political Situation.....	2
2. Situation and Development of the Party System in Bulgaria	5
2.1. Trends in the Right-Wing Political Environment.....	5
2.1.1. The GERB Party	5
2.1.2. The Attack Party	7
2.1.3. The Blue Coalition (made up by Democrats for Strong Bulgaria, DSB, and the Union of Democratic Forces, UDF)	8
2.1.4. The Order, Legality, and Justice Party (OLJ).....	9
2.2. Trends in the Parliamentary Opposition	10
2.2.1. Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP).....	10
2.2.2. Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF).....	11
3. Public Opinion	12
4. Major Conclusions and Forecasts	14

1. The Political Situation

The first quarter of 2011 was marked by the row connected with the leak of conversations held over the phone, which had been recorded by special intelligence devices. The leaked recordings reveal the way in which Prime Minister Boiko Borissov ordered the Director of the Customs Administration, Vanyo Tannov, to discontinue an inspection of the customs authorities in the "Ledenika" Brewery, because he had promised one of the owners – Mikhail Minho (nicknamed Misho the Beer) – "not to touch him" and "to leave him alone". These conversations were wiretapped at the beginning of 2010, when the license of the brewery to operate had been suspended.

Apart from this particular conversation, the leak contained another two phone calls concerning the same inspection of the customs authorities – one between Vanyo Tannov and his deputy, Antoni Strandjev, and the other – between Vanyo Tannov and the Minister of Finance, Simeon Dyankov. In these phone calls, Vanyo Tannov shares with his deputy what the Prime Minister has ordered him to do and seeks Strandjev's advice about what to do in these circumstances. For his part, Minister Dyankov tells Tannov to go ahead with the inspection.

These conversations became public after they were disclosed by the "Gallery" weekly, which is close to Alexei Petrov, former officer from the National Security Agency, who is currently investigated as a defendant in several criminal cases. The Deputy Editor-in-Chief of the "Gallery" weekly, Yavor Dachkov, declared that the recordings in question were sent over to him by an unknown person.

The initial reaction of Boiko Borissov was to say that the contents of the conversations were manipulated and the manipulation was carried out by organized crime, which wanted to discredit the government. Out of all the participants in the telephone calls, only Antoni Standjev confirmed that the conversation between him and V. Tannov was au-

thentic and that the Director of the Customs Administration had indeed told him how the Prime Minister ordered him to discontinue the customs inspection at the brewery. As late as two weeks after the leakage, Tannov gave a press-conference, at which he declared that the recordings were forged. Minister Dyankov refused to make any comment on this case.

The opposition parties were exceedingly critical in their reaction to the event and launched consultations for tabling a non-confidence vote against the Cabinet. Boiko Borissov, however, was quicker than the opposition and he himself tabled a motion for a confidence vote concerning the overall policy of his government. The vote took place only days after the leaked recordings were made public.

One of the objectives, which the government pursued with this confidence vote, was to secure the support of the National Assembly and thus avoid the looming political crisis. The Cabinet did receive the desired confidence vote. Apart from the GERB Party MPs, the confidence vote gained the support of the Attack Party MPs, and the independent MPs who had earlier left the OLI Party and the Blue Coalition. The Blue Coalition abstained from the vote, which was a yet another confirmation of the fact that the governing majority no longer enjoyed its confidence, and this has been a trend observed since the end of last year. The BSP and the MRF voted against the confidence vote, i.e. they manifested their non-confidence in the governing majority and its Cabinet.

For a long time the authorities failed to provide answers to the questions about the leak of wiretapped telephone conversations, such as: who was the person or persons subject to eavesdropping and why, who ordered this intelligence operation, etc. The governing majority launched different versions through the Minister of Interior, Tzvetan Tzvetanov, including the version that the wiretapping was organized by criminal groups, or that the conversations leaked after a failure of the cell phone operators' network.

Subsequently, it was made clear that the conversations have indeed been obtained by means of special intelligence devices and that it was Vanyo Tannov who was subject to the wiretapping operation. An inspection carried out by the Prosecutor's Office revealed that the operation was legitimate and that an application to this effect was filed by the special services. The official stance of the Prosecutor's Office, however, made it clear that Tannov was eavesdropped on the motive that illegal goods traffickers could try to contact him, not because of any doubts that he himself was involved in any illegal activities.

Expert assessments concerning the authenticity and trustworthiness of Prime Minister Borissov's wiretapped conversations were carried out by the Institute of Criminology with the Ministry of Interior and by the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (BAS). Their analyses showed that the original recordings have been re-recorded and were supplied with specific sound tags, but no clear answer was given to the question whether there was any manipulation of their contents. The explanatory motive was that in order to establish the authenticity of the recording, the experts needed to hear the original recordings. These original recordings, however, were all destroyed.

The parliamentary committee overseeing the control over special intelligence devices came up with an official opinion on this occasion. Its main conclusion is that no control whatsoever has been exercised over the way in which the special intelligence devices are handled and that an amendment should be made to the primary or secondary legislation in this area, in order to elaborate a better regulation to this particular field. The Prosecutor's Office declared that the recordings of the leaked phone calls had not reached them yet. According to law, the prosecutor who ordered the wiretapping operation must receive all wiretapped conversations on a hard copy carrier.

The opposition accused the governing majority of having set up the practice of filtering the wiretapped conversations, in order to use

them subsequently for their purely political goals. Both the parliamentary opposition and the Blue Coalition said that the main responsibility for this state of affairs had to be borne by the Minister of Interior, Tzvetan Tzvetanov, and that he had to hand in his resignation without any delay. The DSB leader, Ivan Kostov, declared that the recordings leak was detrimental not only in terms of the damages incurred to the national security, but it was also a clear proof of the fact that the governing majority was unable to guarantee the country's national security. In Kostov's opinion, this also proved that the government was incapable of combating organized crime, either.

The rows ensuing from the leaked wiretapping brought about re-shuffles in the sector of national security. The National Security Agency (NSA) Director, Tzvetlin Yovchev, was released from his post. The motives of Prime Minister Boiko Borissov in this respect are that Yovchev failed to cope with the rules and mechanisms of control in his own agency. Apart from this, the Minister of Interior, Tzvetan Tzvetanov, was deprived of the right to sign applications for the employment of special intelligence devices, and the authority to do so was transferred to the Chief Secretary of the Ministry of Interior.

A new governmental agency was also set up with the powers to combat corruption (COMCOR), the statute of which for the time being is far too unclear and contradictory. This raises a number of questions as to the effectiveness of its future functioning. The Blue Coalition launched searing criticism at Prime Minister Borissov on account of the appointment of Petko Sertov, former Director of the National Security Agency, to the post of Deputy Director of COMCOR. The leadership of the Blue Coalition declared that such an appointment was inadmissible, because Sertov headed the NSA under the ex-tri-partite coalition and in this former capacity of his, it was Sertov who bore the responsibility for the failures in the combat against corruption and organized crime.

Prime Minister Borissov said that Sertov enjoyed the confidence of the previous government and that was what made him take such a decision. In his opinion, this was the way in which the interests of the opposition would be protected in this new governmental agency. The stance expressed by the Prime Minister further increased the discontent of the Blue Coalition and, in response, its representatives declared that at the next non-confidence vote in Parliament they would vote in favor of it.

The wiretapping row was also mentioned in the February Interim Report of the European Commission on the progress Bulgaria had made in the area of the judiciary and internal order. The report makes the recommendation for Bulgaria to guarantee that the legal provisions concerning the employment of special intelligence devices are properly observed. The assessments made in this report did not differ much from those already made in the previous reports. The finding of the EC is that the country is pursuing an active policy of combating organized crime by means of police operations and arrests, but the charges brought up against the perpetrators are few in number. This finding has been familiar for a long time now and the Report only repeats what the previous reports say on the issue. The lack of sufficient guilty verdicts and convictions in connection with key criminal law-suits has once again been reported as a weakness. The recommendation in this respect is to amend the Penal Code in such a way that the provisions concerning the various corruption crimes be reworked and respectively improved.

With the support of the Attack Party, the GERB parliamentary majority voted for the establishment of a specialized criminal court and specialized prosecutor's office. The special law-court will have two instances and will have a nation-wide jurisdiction. The last instance in Bulgaria's three-instance litigation will be the Supreme Court of Cassation.

The opposition qualified the specialized law-court as a tool created by the governing

majority for setting scores with their opponents and expressed misgivings with respect to its impartiality. The BSP and the MRF declared their readiness to address the Constitutional Court, because – in their opinion – the establishment of such a specialized court was in breach of the Constitution.

Over the past quarter, President Parvanov was more passive than usual. His ABV project was absent from the focus of public attention and most probably this is a targeted "wait and see" strategy of slowing down. At this stage, the prospects of the ABV Movement remain dim. There is the open question about the tactic and strategy, which the ABV intends to pursue at the forthcoming local and presidential elections. Opinion polls indicate that for the time being the Movement remains unrecognizable for the citizens and at this stage it has no potential for electoral support.

The economic situation in the country remains unstable. According Eurostat data, Bulgaria is one of the countries in the European Union, which have recorded the highest inflation rates in February 2011. The inflation rate in Bulgaria, for instance, has risen by 4.6 percent in comparison with the year before. It is Romania and Estonia only that come ahead of Bulgarian in terms of inflation – with 7.6 and 5.5 inflation rates respectively.

The ongoing rise of fuel prices in the country brought about mass protests, which were organized spontaneously on the Facebook. Bulgaria is the country of the lowest incomes in the entire European Union and the price growth has further increased the poverty level in the country. It is possible for these protests to intensify over the next few months, should the price rise continue unchecked.

The government said that it was impossible to lower the excise duties levied on fuels, and that the reason underlying inflation was the situation in Libya and the rising petrol prices on the international markets. The opposition and the trade unions demanded that the minimum wage in the country be increased, so that the worse-off citizens could

be partially compensated. The government declared that should such a step be undertaken, this could adversely affect the stability of the government budget.

Not only inflation, but also the unemployment rate has been on the rise in this country, and this fact is likely to further intensify the social discontent with the incumbent government. This tendency will most probably continue and even escalate, as company insolvencies have been on the rise as well. The government remains passive on this issue and offers no adequate measures for the stabilization of the economic situation in the country. This has an adverse bearing upon the confidence rating of the Cabinet, too, and results in a decline of the support rating, which the GERB party has enjoyed thus far.

The earthquake in Japan and the crisis in the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant created a new situation concerning the prospects of implementing the Belene NPP project. The European Commission gave a clear signal that the project should be reconsidered. In this way, the fate of the contentious project is becoming increasingly less clear. The site of the Belene NPP is located in proximity to highly seismic regions. The Russian supplier – the Rossatom Company – said that additional security systems could be provided, but this would additionally appreciate the cost of the project. All this makes the eventual agreement between the Bulgarian government and Russia quite unclear indeed.

In Bulgaria, the BSP and President Parvanov continue to defend the NPP Belene project, while the parties of the Blue Coalition continue to be its staunchest opponents. To date, the government continues to hesitate with respect to its final decision. The official stance of the Minister of the Economy, Energy, and Tourism, Traicho Traikov, is that the final arrangement should not be rushed before all the risks have been properly assessed. In a TV interview on one of the national television channels, Prime Minister Borissov said that with certainty the Belene NPP would be constructed.

The Libyan crisis was among the topics, which Bulgarians followed with special interest. After some hesitation, the government said that Bulgaria would participate in the international operation for enforcing the arms embargo imposed on Libya with its frigate and will also be sending humanitarian aid to the Libyan people, but will refrain from taking part in the current military operation of the Coalition of the Willing.

2. Situation and Development of the Party System in Bulgaria

2.1. Trends in the Right-Wing Political Environment

2.1.1. The GERB Party

The past first quarter of 2011 was the most difficult trimester for the GERB Party since the beginning of its governance. The rows surrounding the party in connection with the phone calls leaked into the public environment, the recording of which was done by means of special intelligence devices, had an adverse effect on the public confidence in both the party and its government.

At the same time, during the confidence vote procedure, it became quite clear that the GERB Party already has an independent parliamentary majority of its own, as it now can rely on the firm support of the independent members of parliament who used to be MPs of the OLI Party and the Blue Coalition before leaving their initial parliamentary factions. This new situation may result in a re-grouping of the forces at the National Assembly and may affect the behavior of the GERB parliamentary faction towards the other parties that have supported it thus far, namely: the Attack Party and partially – the Blue Coalition. The fact that the Blue Coalition went into opposition exacerbated the dialog between the two coalition parties – the UDF and DSB, on one hand, and the GERB Party, on the other. Prime Minister Boiko Borissov also toughened his tone with respect to the “blue” parliamentary faction.

The rows taking place within the GERB Party brought about some changes in the leadership of its parliamentary faction. Thus far, the parliamentary faction had three co-chairs: Iskra Fidossova, Krassimir Velchev, and Todor Dimitrov. From now on, the only Chairman of the GERB parliamentary faction will be Krassimir Velchev. The leadership of the party motivated the alteration with their desire to achieve a better distribution of responsibilities within the party, pointing out the additional engagements assigned to Iskra Fidossova and Todor Dimitrov in connection with the preparation of the party for the upcoming local and presidential elections this fall. According to insiders, however, the changes were made on account of the rows surrounding Fidossova, who, for her part, is close to the Minister of Interior, Tzvetan Tzvetanov.

For the first time since GERB came into power, the parliamentary majority of the party cast a divided vote. This happened during the voting procedure for the formation of an ad-hoc parliamentary committee, the task of which was connected with the investigation of all the circumstances around the information gathered by special intelligence devices on account of an incident in the hospital of the town of Gorna Oryahovitza, which had stirred the public opinion. This information was disclosed at the National Assembly by the Minister of Interior, Tzvetan Tzvetanov, in person. At this parliamentary disclosure, he accused the physicians of having deliberately caused the death of a newly-born baby on the basis of their wiretapped phone calls, although no expert assessment concerning this case had been done at that time. The doctors spent some time in detention, and afterwards the expert assessment made it clear that there was no premature birth, but a mere accidental miscarriage.

During the vote, a total of 16 GERB MPs abstained, and this can be qualified as some degree of surging mistrust in Tzvetanov on the part of his own parliamentary faction. This is also in line with the heightened negative pub-

lic attitudes to the Minister of Interior, who has now become one of the least approved ministers in the GERB government, a testimony to which are a number of opinion polls held of late (see more on the issue in the "Public Opinion" section). The rest of the parliamentary majority dismissed the motion tabled by the parliamentary opposition for setting up such an ad-hoc parliamentary committee.

The GERB Party made an official presentation of its election headquarters entrusted with the preparation of the upcoming elections this fall. Despite the serious blows, which Tzvetan Tzvetanov had sustained since the beginning of the current year, it is he precisely that will chair the GERB election headquarters. His deputy will be the Secretary of the party, Tzvetomir Paunov, while Iskra Fidossova, Dimitar Lazarov, and Tzveta Karayancheva will be in charge of the legal issues and the methodology of the election campaigns. Krassimir Velchev will be in charge of the connection between the newly established election headquarters and the GERB parliamentary faction.

The opposition was quick to react abruptly to Tzvetanov's appointment with the motive that he had the capacity to influence the way in which the elections are held. The BSP and the MRF even said that they would invite international observers at the time of the elections. Tzvetanov answered that he would take a leave from office during the election campaign and therefore the opposition had no grounds for apprehension.

As far as the local elections are concerned, Tzvetan Tzvetanov announced that the party would aspire to reach its 2007 results when the GERB Party won 10 mayor's seats in the regional centers and a total of 993 municipal councilors.

The candidate of the GERB Party for the presidential election will be made clear in the summer, according to a statement made by Tzvetanov himself. At this stage, there is very little clarity as to the possible presidential nominations. Before the public rows took hold of GERB, Tzvetanov was a potential can-

didate. However, the situation is quite different now. The current appointment of Tzveta-nov to the post of Chairman of the Election Headquarters indicates that he is hardly likely to become the GERB Party's nominee. The declining confidence in him has turned him into a potentially risky candidate from GERB's internal party point of view. Another option, which could have proved successful for the party, is the European Commissioner, Christalina Georgieva. Unfortunately, she cannot run the presidential election now, because she has not lived in Bulgaria for the last five years and this is the uncontested provision of the Bulgarian Constitution. The presidential nomination of Boiko Borissov has constantly been circulated in the public environment over the last five years as one of the possible nominations. According to insider, he still has not decided whether to run, but the party pressure on him to this effect has been growing.

With the closer approach of the local elections, the contradictions in certain local structures of the GERB Party have increasingly begun to intensify. This is mainly due to the ongoing in-fights between the various lobbies for position and influence with respect to electable seats on the party slates. Should the party fail to overcome these processes, this could have an adverse impact on the GERB election outcome in certain regions of the country.

2.1.2. The Attack Party

The support, which the Attack Party has been lending to GERB thus far, even after the resounding public rows, is continuing to affect the party in an increasingly more adverse way. The Attack Party is not only losing its own identity, but it has also been sending contradictory signals to its own supporters, because in practice its parliamentary conduct reveals a retreat from the characteristic anti-corruption discourse, which the party has been practicing thus far. The doubts of corruption and abuse of power, in which GERB has been shrouded of late, brought about no reaction on the part of the Attack. Moreover, the Attack Party

firmly stood behind the governing majority and its Cabinet. The stance taken by the party leader, Volen Siderov, is that these scandals are provoked by structures connected with Alexei Petrov and are aimed at the same time at preventing the Cabinet from coming victorious in its combat against organized crime by destabilizing the entire governance of the country. In this sense, the Attack Party will continue to support the government in its combat against corruption and organized crime.

The Member of the European Parliament, Slavi Binev, took a stance differing from that of the party leadership. He said that Prime Minister Boiko Borissov had to take the personal responsibility for the wiretapped phone calls he was involved in. In Binev's opinion, there is no doubt whatsoever that the telephone conversations are authentic, but the row was subdued, despite the cumbersome "moral case", which Borissov is still facing.

According to insiders, this stance taken by Slavi Binev is due to the differences, which he and Volen Siderov are currently having. Binev does not share Attack's support for the government and this has brought about the escalation of tension between the two. This conflict may result in the split of the Attack Party, because there are several Attack MPs who have been indignant against Siderov's policy for a long time now.

The Attack Party's support for GERB continues to instigate contradictions with the local structures of the party and to increase the centrifugal forces there. With the approaching local elections this fall, these processes are rather likely to intensify. The Attack will run the local elections on its own, and within a two months' time the party candidates for mayors and municipal councilors will be disclosed in public. Siderov declared that coalitions would be set up only in mixed population regions, while in the rest of the municipalities the nominations for mayors will be raised independently.

The obliteration of the Attack party image and the declining electoral support for

the party itself have enhanced the radical discourse of its leader, who at the same time has intensified the rate of staging populist initiatives typical for the party. Thus for instance, at the National Assembly the Attack demanded that a declaration be passed, which should announce that genocide was carried out against the Bulgarian people during the Ottoman domination in this country. The harsh discourse used by the representatives of the Attack Party during the ensuing debate contradicted the civilized polite tone and was a reminder of the most radical manifestations of the style and conduct of this party. The idea about such a declaration was dismissed by Parliament, but it was a yet another proof that the Attack Party will continue to put its stakes on extremely populist topics – especially on the eve of the forthcoming elections.

It is in the same sense that another initiative of the Attack Party should be interpreted as well. The party launched a national subscription for taking down the news in Turkish from the air of the Bulgarian National Television channel. Simultaneously, activists of the party started protests in front of the National Television building. This idea, however, failed to get the approval of the GERB Party and Prime Minister Boiko Borissov. For his part, the latter hastened to transfer the responsibility for this decision to the management of the BNT, saying that what it took to settle this issue was neither legislative initiative nor any decree of the Council of Ministers.

The management of the BNT announced that it was doing the preparatory work for launching a regional TV channel aimed to host programs of various ethnic groups, which was due to start functioning in the autumn. Only then could the news in Turkish be taken down from the BNT channel and transferred to the new channel. Siderov said he could not agree with this situation and made a demand for the immediate removal of the news in Turkish. Until this happens, Siderov added, the Attack party would continue both its subscription and outdoor protests.

These radical initiatives of the Attack Party should be interpreted as part of its election campaign, which in practice has already started for the party, especially after Volen Siderov declared that he himself would be running for President at the upcoming presidential election.

2.1.3. The Blue Coalition (made up by Democrats for Strong Bulgaria, DSB, and the Union of Democratic Forces, UDF)

The long awaited turnabout in the attitude of the Blue Coalition to the GERB Party governance finally took place during the first quarter of 2011. The parties of the right-wing coalition refused to give their support to the government at the parliamentary confidence vote demanded by Boiko Borissov and abstained from the vote altogether. The reasons underlying their act are complex. On one hand, the rows on account of the leaked phone calls wiretapped by special intelligence devices were subject to ambiguous assessment by the Blue Coalition. The qualifications given by the coalition were divided between: a) a blow against the national security of the country; and b) the incapacity of the government to cope with organized crime. It is in the latter connection that criticism was launched on account of infringing human rights and the basic values of democracy in this country, the visible consequences of which are both the massive wiretapping to no clear purposes and the increasing frequency of police arbitrary acts.

As a result of this assessment, the Blue Coalition took the categorical stance that the Minister of Interior, Tzvetan Tzvetanov, had to hand in his resignation. Furthermore, the DSB leader, Ivan Kostov, declared that the Blue Coalition would vote against the government at the next non-confidence vote, which the BSP and the MRF intended to table shortly.

Another significant reason for the Blue Coalition to withdraw its support for the governing majority is the economic situation in the country. For more than a year now, the Blue

Coalition has been systematically criticizing the Cabinet for the lack of genuine reforms in the public sector. Ivan Kostov qualified the economic situation in Bulgaria as worrisome with a view to the rising inflation and unemployment rates since the beginning of the current year. In his opinion, the country is in a dire depression and stagflation, whereas the Cabinet is doing nothing to overcome the situation. One of the reasons for the rising inflation rate, according to Kostov, is the activity of the monopolies in the different sectors of the economy. Besides, Kostov expressed his misgivings that the GERB government had concluded a tacit agreement with these same monopolies.

With the approaching elections this fall, the Blue Coalition will get increasingly more critical with respect to the country's government. This is connected with the internal party strategies of the coalition parties, because the shortcomings and weaknesses of the GERB governance make it possible for them to point out an alternative, which should be appropriate for the right-wing electorate. This is the reason why the forthcoming elections are so important for the Blue Coalition. This was made clear in the recent statement of the UDF leader, Martin Dimitrov, who said that the major objective now is the expansion of the coalition format with the participation of other right-wing parties, to the exclusion of the GERB Party, of course. The idea is to consolidate the authentic Right Wing on the national level, which can thus become the foundation of a right-wing governance alternative.

The UDF and DSB are about to finalize their negotiations, the aim of which is to sign an agreement for nominating a joint presidential candidate for the upcoming election this fall. For the time being, there is no clarity as to who the nominee of the two coalition parties will be. Their goal is to attract a maximum number of right-wing parties, willing to stand behind a joint candidate. The names of the possible candidates include those of the Member of the European Parliament Nadezhda Neinksy – former UDF leader and Minis-

ter of Foreign Affairs in Ivan Kostov's Cabinet (1997-2001), the Mayor of the town of Pleven, Naiden Zelenogorsky, and the MPs Veselin Metodiev and Dimo Gyaourov.

The UDF and DSB will be looking for partners at the local elections as well, whereby the local organizations of the two parties will enjoy absolute freedom and the right to make independent choices for the formation of right-wing coalitions and nominating candidates for mayors.

2.1.4. The Order, Legality, and Justice Party (OLJ)

The OLJ Party took an active participation in the campaign for disclosing the leaked recordings obtained by means of special intelligence devices and reveal the contents of the discrediting phone conversations among people from the governing majority. The party has long been suspected of having close contacts with the notorious Alexei Petrov and this has resulted in an increase of the negative attitudes to the party itself. The conduct of the party leader, Yane Yanev, also contributed to the enhanced criticism within the party as well, the target of which was precisely the leader. Thus for instance, one of the founders of the OLJ – Atanas Zhelezchev, who no longer is member of the party, demanded the resignation of Yane Yanev. Zhelezchev also stated that Yanev was due to vacate his seat of a people's deputy. A demand was also made for the resignations of other two active party members, namely those of Atanas Semov and MP Emil Vassilev. This idea was backed up by Todor Velikov as well, who had already left the OLJ parliamentary faction. Todor Velikov is one of those independent MPs who gave their support to the Cabinet during the procedure of the parliamentary confidence vote.

Zhelezchev and Velikov also sent a declaration to the Political Council of the OLJ Party. The declaration points out that Yane Yanev's resignation is the only way for the party to overcome the crisis and regain the confidence of its voters. The appeal states, as well, that

Yanev's conduct over the past several years and especially over the past few months has been in contradiction to the party's program and statute. Another motive for the demanded resignations is that Yanev made decisions completely on his own, without previously consulting the party leadership. Indirectly, the declaration also mentions the connections between Yanev and Alexei Petrov. Yanev is accused of having placed the party "in service of individuals who lack the courage of facing the public directly" and of "disseminating materials as evidence of a dubious value and quality".

Yanev did not react to these demands and accusations. Instead, he and Atanas Semov handed in their resignations, which had to be voted for by the Managing Board of the party. Taking this step, Yanev's goal was to consolidate his positions in the party and to stop short the increasing dissatisfaction among certain groups in the party.

As expected, the Managing Board of the OLI refused to accept the resignations. This was the unanimous vote of all members and delegates present at the session, which was held in an enlarged format with the participation of all chairpersons of municipal party organizations. This revealed that the party is completely dependent on Yanev and that the internal party life is brought down to the leader himself and his closest circle of cronies.

At the end of session, the OLI declared its stance for the immediate resignation of the government and an early general election this coming autumn, which had to be held together with the parliamentary and local elections. Once again the party raised the familiar demand for a Grand National Assembly to be summoned and for a complete overhaul of the country's Constitution to be done.

The OLI Managing Board made a decision to the effect that the party's MPs should be absent from parliamentary sessions to the only exclusion of the parliamentary control hearings on Fridays. By virtue of the decision, the MPs were bound to use their time in tour-

ing the country in order to meet and speak with their voters.

Yanev said that he would continue to disclose information about the corruption practices of the governing majority until the government actually fell. He qualified this endeavor as the major priority for his party.

2.2. Trends in the Parliamentary Opposition

2.2.1. Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP)

Over the first quarter of 2011, the BSP enhanced its criticism addressed to the governing majority and its Cabinet. The party voted for the demise of the Cabinet at the confidence vote tabled by the Prime Minister. In its capacity of a leading opposition party, the BSP has been trying to take advantage of all the weakness revealed in the GERB governance of the country. The rows connected with the party in power make it possible for the socialists to overcome the internal crisis, in which they had plunged after the general election defeat in 2009.

The economic situation marked by a rising inflation and unemployment rates intensified the social demands, which the BSP is addressing to the governing majority. The party came up with the stance that it would firmly stand behind the social protests, the purpose of which would be to topple the incumbent government.

At the end of March, a mass national protest march was held in Sofia under the auspices of the socialists, which gathered nearly 18 thousand people. Speaking at the rally, the BSP leader, Sergei Stanishev, said that the sooner the incumbent government stepped down, the better it would be for all citizens of this country. In his opinion, the pessimism of Bulgarians is growing, the main underlying reason being the policy currently pursued by the GERB Party. The major characteristic features of the incumbent government, in the opinion of the BSP leader, are "the social in-

sensitivity, the disintegration of the state, and the reprisals against all who disagree". Stanishev announced that the alternative to the current situation in the country could be only the social alternative and that this social alternative could be put into effect only by the BSP and Coalition for Bulgaria.

The BSP started its preparation for the forthcoming elections due this fall. The nomination of the party for a presidential candidate has not been announced yet. The only nomination made public to date is the one of the constitutional law professor and former Member of Parliament from Coalition for Bulgaria, Georgi Bliznashky. This nomination was raised by the regional council of the BSP in the Slatina municipality of the capital city.

One of the possible nominees who were subject to discussions over the last few months, namely Stefan Danailov, disproved all probabilities of running the election as a presidential candidate. The Member of the European Parliament, Ivailo Kalfin, has been refusing to comment on this issue thus far, but he is also one of the potential candidates. Kalfin is close to President Parvanov and his possible nomination is certain to receive Parvanov's support.

The election headquarters of the BSP, however, has been considering another strategy as well, namely to nominate a candidate outside the party to the purpose of gaining a maximal broad consensus and the support of other parties. The only goal of such a strategy is clear and it is to declare victory over the GERB presidential candidate. According to BSP insiders, the party is also considering its support for the nomination of Meglena Kuneva, which should be raised by a respective initiative committee. Whether such an option could materialize, depends on the negotiations currently held with the National Movement for Stability and Progress (NMSP).

The BSP remains the second ranking party in the country in terms of electoral support and this is the reason why its role in the presidential race will be of a key significance for the final outcome.

2.2.2. Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF)

The exclusion of the former Deputy Chairman of the MRF, Kassim Dahl, from the party was the most important event for the MRF from an internal party point of view. Everything began when Dahl handed in his resignation from the Central Operating Bureau of the party. At the same time, Kassim Dahl sent a letter to the regional structures of the party, which contained bitter criticism of the MRF and its leader, Ahmed Dogan. In his letter K. Dahl points out that "the MRF has relapsed into a grave internal party collapse and unseen isolation", the blame for which should be borne by the leader Dogan. In Dahl's opinion, with his behavior Dogan has brought the party to a situation where "the common cause – the MRF" has disappeared, making room for "personal causes for rapid material enrichment, without taking into account anyone whosoever and anything whatsoever".

Over the past twenty years, Kassim Dahl was one of the major figures within the MRF. For a long time he was Dogan's "right hand". The principal area of his responsibilities were the structures of the party and the achievements of the MRF were due to a large extent to his exceptional "on site" work. In the past year, however, he entered into a conflict with Ahmed Dogan because of the isolation of the party after the 2009 general election. In 2010, Kassim Dahl was removed from the post of Deputy Chairman of the party, which was actually the first serious signal that a process of restructuring of the influential groups in the party was taking place.

The MRF leadership unanimously condemned the conduct of Kassim Dahl, whereby the overall assessment was that the letter sent to the party structures was a proof of his ambitions to climb to the leadership post in the party. On the other hand, the qualification of the statements made by Kassim Dahl was that they were detrimental to the image and interests of the party, and the criticism they contained was both unjustified and improper.

At the end of February, at a session of the Central Council of the MRF, where Ahmed Dogan was also present, Kassim Dahl was excluded from the party – almost unanimously. Three representatives of the emigrants to Turkey declared that they stood against the exclusion, and so did the former Chairman of the Youth MRF Organization, Korman Ismailov, who is currently an MP from the MRF parliamentary faction. Dogan – who for a long time remained “hidden” from the public focus of the media – for a yet another time refused to make any comment whatsoever and hid again from the “limelight”.

The representatives of the various societies of the Bulgarian emigrants to Turkey, who are members of the Central Council of the MRF, declared that they were standing in defense of Kassim Dahl. In a declaration to the mass media they demanded the resignation of Dogan and the members of the party leadership who were agents or collaborators of the communist secret services. The declaration points out that the MRF “has turned into a model of a post-totalitarian state where fear and the personal interests of the members of the party Central Council have obliterated the cause MRF”.

The battle, which Kassim Dahl has been waging against the MRF leadership, continued after his exclusion as well. He organized a group on the Facebook social net, by means of which he has been inviting members and supporters of the MRF to initiate changes and reforms in the party themselves – “from the bottom up”, so that they could succeed in changing the status quo. At the time being, the Facebook group has gathered about 4500 people.

Ahmed Dogan was ultimately exonerated by the Supreme Administrative Court at the conclusion of his lawsuit concerning his conflict of interests and the royalty he had received to the tune of more than BGN 2 million. This lawsuit is one of those, which the European Commission was monitoring with special interest and which was mentioned in the February EC Interim Report on the prog-

ress, which Bulgaria has made with respect to combating corruption and organized crime.

The outcome of the lawsuit made it incumbent on the National Assembly, in its capacity of the plaintiff in this case, to pay the costs of the litigation. The thesis of the conflict of interests parliamentary committee – the actual party to the lawsuit – was that by receiving the above mentioned royalty, Dogan made himself economically and politically dependent and in this dependent capacity he was making managerial decisions connected with the “Tzankov Kamak” Dam project. He took the money subject to the lawsuit from the Construction and Mining Institute, which is a subsidiary of the Minstroy Company. According to the MPs, what is observed here is a conflict of interests, because Minstroy is a subcontractor of the National Electricity Company in the “Tzankov Kamak” Dam project, and at the same time Dogan is the mandate bearer of the then incumbent government and part and parcel of the then governing tri-partite coalition. With its decision, however, the judicial panel ruled against these claims and came to the conclusion that Ahmed Dogan concluded the contracts for consultancy services before the Conflict of Interests Act actually came into force, i.e. he was not bound by law to observe it at the time he committed the deed, which led to the conflict of interests court proceedings.

3. Public Opinion

The political rows connected with the governing majority brought about a significant change in the attitudes of the Bulgarian citizens. Another major factor, which determined the dynamic development of the public opinion in the country, was connected with the rising inflation rate.

An opinion poll survey held by the Alpha Research Agency at the end of February indicates that the events, which were assessed in the most negative terms by the respondents, are the rise of foodstuff prices (80 percent of the respondents) and the rows with the leaked

wiretapped conversations of the Director of the Customs Administration, Vanyo Tannov, with Prime Minister Boiko Borissov, which were freely circulating in the public environment.

This opinion poll has registered a decline in the confidence of voters towards the government at large. As little as 37 percent of the respondents think that the Cabinet is coping effectively with the challenges the country's governance is facing. The other finding of the survey includes the following information: 79 percent of the respondents disagree with the statement that the government is concerned for the ordinary people, 63 percent consider that the government protects groups close to the ruling circles, 56 percent are of the opinion that the government acts in a chaotic way and has no defined priorities, and another 67 percent cannot see any results from the efforts of the government to combat corruption and organized crime.

On the whole, there is some decline registered in the confidence rating of the government at the beginning of the current year: from 24 percent in December 2010 it has dropped to 22 percent in January 2011. The disapproval rating for the overall activity of the government is 39 percent, which is almost twice as high as the figure of its approval rating.

There has been a serious decline in the approval ratings of the key ministers in the Cabinet. The most conspicuous turnabout is observed with respect to the approval rating of the Minister of Interior, Tzvetan Tzvetanov. In December, he was the most highly approved minister and the politician with the highest positive rating with 35 percent of approval. In February, his approval rating already stands at 23 percent, and this ranks him second – after the Minister of Finance, Simeon Dyankov – in the rating scale of the most ineffective ministers. These figures are undoubtedly due to the rows Tzvetanov was shrouded in, both with the leaked wiretapped recordings and his material wealth and tax returns. The Minister of the Regional Development and Public Works, Rossen Plevneliev, continues to be the

most approved minister in the Cabinet and his approval rating stands at 37 percent. Second and third after him rank the Minister of Agriculture and Foods, Miroslav Naidenov, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nicolay Mladenov. The approval rating of Prime Minister Boiko Borissov has marked a slight decline from 42 percent to 40 percent.

Despite the serious decline in the confidence rating of the governing majority, the GERB Party continues to be the number one political force in the country. The electoral potential of the party has dropped from 27 percent in December 2010 to 26.1 percent at the end of February 2011. As the opinion poll survey shows, predominantly people of lower incomes and in a graver financial situation have withdrawn their support for the party.

The rows surrounding the government have brought about an increase – though insignificant – in the electoral support rating of the BSP: from 15.2 percent in December 2010 to 16.6 percent at the end of February 2011. The BSP leader, Sergei Stanishev, has preserved his confidence rating, which currently stands at 15 percent.

Irrespective of the conflicts observed within the MRF, the party of Ahmed Dogan has preserved its traditional level of electoral support of 4.9 percent. What is observed at the same time, however, is a decline of the confidence rating of the party leader – from 7 percent in December 2010 to 4 percent at the end of February 2011.

If the general election were held today, 3.4 percent of the respondents would cast their ballots for the Blue Coalition. And yet, about a fifth of the UDF and DSB supporters would still be hesitating as to the party or coalition they would vote for.

The Attack Party enjoys the support of 2.5 percent of the electorate, according to the opinion poll survey, which makes quite problematic its capacity to overcome the 4 percent electoral threshold at the time being. The confidence rating of the party leader, Volen Siderov, currently stands at around 10 percent.

Another finding of the opinion poll survey is that 38.9 percent of the voters have declared their categorical opinion that if the general election were held today, they would not go to the polls altogether.

The opinion poll survey of the Alpha Research Agency also includes questions connected with the presidential and local elections due to take place this fall. About 63 percent of the respondents would like to see a new President from a different political force, whereas 33 percent consider that the President should be a GERB nominee. This indicates the probability for channeling an alternative vote against the governing majority at a possible runoff of the presidential election. The data obtained to this effect in the Alpha Research opinion poll survey are a yet another indication that the GERB Party is increasingly shedding off its capacity to be an alternative-free factor in Bulgarian politics.

As far as the local elections are concerned, 51 percent of the respondents would like to see a new mayor in their own municipality. In the regional centers, this opinion reaches an even higher levels – as high as around 60 percent. Moreover, 56 percent of the respondents have expressed the apprehension that pressure may be exerted on the voters as to how to vote. These suspicions are further intensified in the small settlement where this percentage level exceeds 60 percent. The fact that the Minister of Interior, Tzvetan Tzvetanov, was elected Chairman of the GERB Election Headquarters, and that the mass registration of citizens in certain settlement, which has been going on for a long time now to the purpose of making it legitimate for them to vote precisely there, further enhances the apprehension of voters who fear possible manipulations at the upcoming local elections.

4. Major Conclusions and Forecasts

1. The rows connected with the leaked recordings of phone calls obtained by means of special intelligence devices lead to several major conclusions:

First, there is a serious breach in the structures of the national security services, which brings to the agenda the issue about the reorganization of these services, as well as the methods by which they collect information. This makes it necessary for the law-makers to introduce respective legislative or regulatory amendments concerning the security sector and, most importantly, to introduce special measures concerning the control and implementation of such special intelligence devices.

One remains with the impression that the information obtained by special intelligence devices does not reach its addressees – the Prosecutor's Office in particular, and this was made quite clear in the case with the wiretapping of the Director of the Customs Administration, Vanyo Tannov. This enhances the danger of information abuse and its use for the personal or group interests and purposes of certain structures within the special services themselves.

Second, an impression was created in the public environment that the case has not been clarified to the fullest and that the governing majority is personally interested in hushing and covering it. This most definitely has a detrimental effect on the image of the Cabinet and the individuals involved in the wiretapped conversations. The Minister of Interior, Tzvetan Tzvetanov, is the person most strongly affected by the wiretapping scandal. From a minister enjoying the highest approval rating and a politician of 2010 he has now become one of the ministers enjoying the worst approval ratings.

Third, the leaked recordings indicate that certain informal structures have a vested interest in discrediting the government and its selected individual representatives in particular, by employing resources and methods typical for the secret services.

The political situation by the end of the current year will be determined mainly by the approaching presidential and local elections scheduled for this fall. The rising inflation and unemployment rates will be in the focus of

the election debate and the opposition will inevitably avail of them as an argument against the governing majority. The succession of rows, which have been raging in the media since the beginning of the year, indicates that the election campaign will be extremely shrill and full of compromising materials.

2. The rows surrounding the GERB Party brought about the declining electoral support rating of the party. For the time being, Prime Minister Borissov has managed to subdue the attacks against his government, and by tabling the motion for a winning confidence vote in Parliament he succeeded in preventing a political crisis. The re-shuffles carried out in the leadership of the GERB parliamentary faction indicate that some shifts have taken place in the power play between the influential groups in the party. Thus for instance, Iskra Fidossova who is considered to be close to the Minister of Interior, Tzvetan Tzvetanov, has been losing positions. The rows around her will probably find a resolution over the coming months. At the expense of her demise, Tzetzka Tzacheva and Krassimir Velchev, who are said to be close to the Prime Minister, Boiko Borissov, have taken full control of the GERB parliamentary faction. For the time being, Boiko Borissov has refrained from dismissing the Minister of Interior, Tzvetan Tzvetanov, despite the numerous mistakes he has made in the sector of his responsibilities. Should the rows around Tzvetanov continue unabated, a demand for his resignation would be a likely outcome, because these rows affect the image of the whole government.

3. The Attack Party continues to be GERB's loyal ally, but this has an adverse effect on its electoral support rating. What has been observed at the same time is the dissatisfaction within a number of local party structures, which disapprove of the support the party leadership has been lending to GERB. A critical stance to this effect was also taken by the Member of the European Parliament, Slavi Binev, who was elected MEP from the Attack party slate. Binev's criticism may affect the

stability and unity of the Attack parliamentary faction, because it contains MPs who are quite close to him.

The intensified populist and radical initiatives of the Attack Party indicate that its general strategy has been modified on the eve of the upcoming elections. Volen Siderov's party will put its stakes on an aggressive campaign, which will further exacerbate the political debate in the country. This strategy, however, is hardly likely to prove effective, because the Attack's overall conduct manifests that it is actually part and parcel of the governance of the country, although the party has no official representatives in any of the governmental institutions.

4. The Blue Coalition withdrew its support for the government and in practice has now gone into opposition. At the next non-confidence vote, which the BSP and the MRF are planning to table, the Blue Coalition is likely to vote for the demise of the government. The reasons why should be sought mainly in two major directions. On one hand, there has been an increasingly broader gap between the visions of the Blue Coalition and the policy pursued by the GERB government in a number of economic and public sectors. On the other hand, "the blue" aim at presenting themselves as the genuine right-wing alternative in the country, which will help them attract many of the voters who now feel disappointed with the GERB Party governance.

For the time being, however, the outflow of GERB voters has not been transformed into real support for the Blue Coalition. Both the UDF and DSB enjoy stable electoral positions, but they still lack the necessary electoral resources, which could make it possible for them to get broader support for their vision to head the country's governance. This is the reason why the Blue Coalition will be trying to expand its format by attempting to unite some of the other traditional right-wing parties around itself, as this year's local and presidential elections open up a favorable opportunity for setting up precisely such a broader coalition.

5. The OLU has continued to encapsulate itself. The rest of the parties – both on the right and on the left – have been avoiding the dialog with Yane Yanev's party. To a large extent, this is due to the negative public image of the party as a result of allegations about its connections with the notorious Alexei Petrov. It is highly likely for Yanev to continue to disclose information and other compromising materials against the governing majority in the future as well.

6. The rows engulfing GERB and the economic situation in the country marked by rising inflation and unemployment rates stabilized the public support, which the BSP has been enjoying of late. The party seems to have overcome the painful electoral defeat at the 2009 general election and it is currently making increasingly louder claims addressed to the country's government. The organized social protests indicate that the BSP has been attempting to take control over this social discontent and transform it into political demands addressed to the country's governance.

The internal party in-fights are gradually abating or have wisely been put on the party's back-burner. This fact has also stabilized the positions of the party leader, Sergei Stanishev, within his own party.

The upcoming local and presidential elections this fall are especially important for the BSP, because they will be the gauge measuring the political attitudes in the country and the genuine assessment of the job done so far by the GERB Party and its government. The presidential candidate of Coalition for Bulgaria has not been disclosed thus far. It is still unclear whether the BSP will put its stakes on a nominee who could attract broader support for the party or will rather nominate a narrow party candidate. It is almost certain, however, that the presidential election will be decided at a runoff. It is in this sense that finding a candidate who will be acceptable for a broader circle of voters could probably prove to be the more effective option. This is also the reason why the BSP has already initiated talks with NMSP and the MRF.

7. The removal of Kassim Dahl from the MRF has revealed for a yet another time the authoritarian nature of the Movement from an internal party point of view. Kassim Dahl has always been one of the leading figures in the MRF since the very inception of the party. Despite the fact that the governing bodies of the MRF took a united and consolidated stance on the issue, his dismissal may bring about some agitation in certain MRF structures and this could have an adverse impact on the party results in municipalities close to Dahl at the local elections this fall.

Dahl's initiative on the Facebook, whereby he appeals to the MRF members and supporters to become initiators of changes in the party "from the bottom up", indicates that he will continue with his attempts to effect changes in the party. The probability for Kassim Dahl to launch activities aiming at the establishment of a new party is less likely, which, however, does not preclude his aspiration to attract to his own point of view certain local structures in his endeavors to exercise an outside impact on the party. The strongly centralized and clientele-oriented manner of party leadership in the MRF, however, is making his chances for success quite unlikely.

About the editors:

Georgi Karasimeonov, Professor, Doctor of Philosophical Sciences, is Head of the Department of Political Science at the "St. Kliment Ohridski" Sofia University, Director of the Institute for Political and Legal Studies, and Editor-in-Chief of the "Political Studies" Journal. Between 1991 and 1998 he was Chairman of the Bulgarian Political Science Association.

Contact: ipls@dir.bg

Doctor Milen Ljubenov is Assistant Professor at the Department of Political Science at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

Contact: mlubenov@abv.bg



Imprint

Friedrich Ebert Foundation
Office Bulgaria
97, Knjaz Boris I St.
1000 Sofia, Bulgaria
Responsible:
Marc Meinardus, Director

Orders

e-mail: office@fes.bg
Att.: Emilia Burgaslieva

Translation

Antonia Parcheva

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.