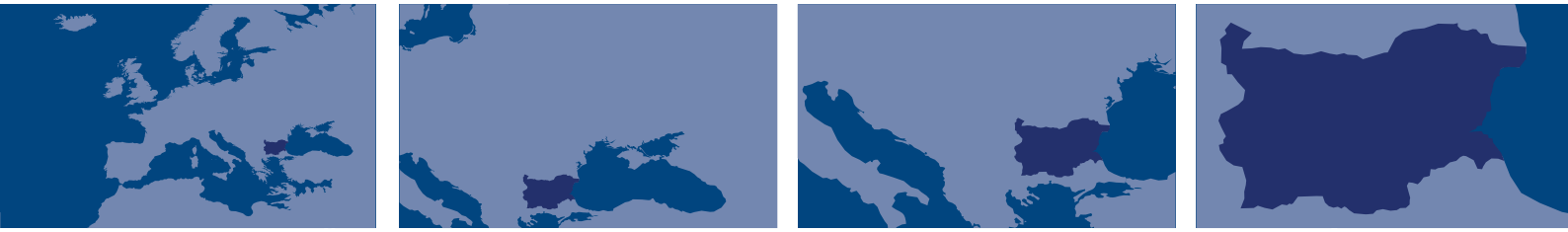
Friedrich Ebert Foundation
Office Bulgaria
Analyses



Georgi Karasimeonov, Milen Lyubenov (Eds.)

BAROMETER

Political Parties Development in Bulgaria

Vol.11 Issue 2
April – June 2011

The political situation in the country will be getting increasingly more dynamic and tense with a view to the upcoming presidential and local elections due to take place on October 23d. The political parties have already launched their political campaigns, although the official start of the election campaign is due to start this coming autumn.

The continuing trend for a decline in the GERB Party electoral support turns the forthcoming elections into an extremely important event for this party, as, to a large extent, these elections will reveal the level of the genuine electoral support for the incumbent government. This fact makes GERB extremely cautious with respect to the presidential election in particular. The party's presidential nominee will be disclosed as late as the beginning of September, which shows that the party is facing a serious dilemma and is still hesitating how to find its wining formula for running the presidential election.

The disgraceful behavior of the Attack Party over the past three months confirmed the forecasts that it was going to pursue an aggressive election campaign. Its actions in front of the mosque in the capital city contradict all major democratic values and principles, and infringe basic human rights. With the approach of the elections this fall, new provocations on the part of the Attack cannot be ruled out.

This fall's presidential election is of a paramount significance for the BSP, as it is the corner-stone for the future of the party and its leadership. Having lost the 2009 general election, the BSP can now avail of the opportunity to manifest that it is a political entity capable of regaining the confidence of voters. Therefore, the major goal of the BSP at the time being is to prevent GERB from winning the presidential election. This is the reason why the party is ready to seek various options, which will make it possible for it to find the most appropriate formula conducive to the accomplishment of this task.

FRIEDRICH EBERT STIFTUNG

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. The Political Situation

Despite the fact that the European Parliament committee voted for the accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the Schengen Area, the country's prospects for full-fledged membership are insufficiently clear as yet. Bulgaria has met all the technical criteria, but issues connected with security, corruption, and the combat against organized crime remain to be solved, and the official decision for such an accession is made not by the European Parliament, but by the European Council, where the Prime Ministers of the 27 member countries sit.

Although the latest Interim Report of the European Commission explicitly stated that appointments lacking transparency in the judiciary will be no longer tolerated, the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) announced a yet another appointment, which resulted in a row. Vladimira Yaneva, a judge of 4 years of effective length of service, was appointed Chairperson of the Sofia City District Court – the biggest court in Bulgaria. Her nomination won over the candidatures of judges with much larger professional experience and number of adjudicated court cases.

Yaneva is a close friend of Tzvetan Tzvetanov's, the Minister of Interior, and this is the reason why this appointment was interpreted by many as the product of political pressure exerted on the part of the governing majority.

It also became clear that Yaneva was the presiding judge of a court panel adjudicating a court case of a paramount significance – that of the "Sofia City Real Estate" Municipal Company, despite the fact that she was in a situation of conflict of interests, because on behalf of her father she had previously bought two pieces of real estate from this same company. An examination carried out by the Inspectorate of the Supreme Judicial Council showed that Yaneva unjustifiably delayed the adjudication of this particular court case.

Yaneva's appointment resulted in the resignations of two respected judges from the Supreme Judicial Council as a sign of total disagreement with its unsubstantiated decision. Protests were also heard from various parts of the judicial community. For the time being, Yaneva has been refusing to hand in her resignation and on the day she had to face a hearing at the Supreme Judicial Council she reported ill. A petition against her appointment has also been filed with the Supreme Administrative Court.

Over the past three months the GERB Party made an attempt to find support for tabling constitutional amendments, making it possible to pass future government budgets with budget deficits exceeding 2 percent only based on the votes of a two third qualified parliamentary majority. This idea, however, is unacceptable both for the BSP and the MRF on one hand, and for DSB, on the other. And what it takes for a constitutional amendment to be passed by Parliament is precisely such a two third qualified majority. Nevertheless, at the very end of June, the first reading of the proposed amendment was passed, coupled with the provision that the Cabinet is legally bound to spend annually not more than 40 percent of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The BSP and the MRF voted against, but the Blue Coalition seconded the proposed amendments.

Another issue, which provoked debates among the parties and the public opinion at large, was connected with the recall of those Bulgarian ambassadors who in the past have collaborated with the former State Security services. This issue came to top the agenda at the end of March, when the list of diplomats connected with the communist Secret Services was made public. President Parvanov refused to recall the ambassadors and this was the reason why the Cabinet decided to circumvent him by issuing orders for the am-

bassadors to make a business trip back to Bulgaria. At the same time interim replacements were appointed, which does not require a special decree by the President.

It is in connection with this situation that an amendment to the Diplomatic Service Act was passed at its first reading at the end of June, which envisages a prohibition for ex- collaborators of the former State Security services, banning their appointment to diplomatic posts. The BSP opposed this decision and declared that it would address the Constitutional Court for a further review of the issue.

Several events from this period have indicated that serious lobbies in the energy sector exist, which have tried and are trying to exert their influence on the functioning of the government. At the beginning of April, the Minister of the Economy, Energy, and Tourism, Traicho Traikov, expressed his disagreement with the decision of the Cabinet to freeze the price of fuels for a month's period of time. This decision was passed after mass protests of citizens prompted by the rising prices of fuels. Minister Traikov demanded that "Lukoil", the company in which the government has retained a state-owned stake, should provide information to the government about its production costs, as the government agencies have no information about the role of costs in the formation of petrol and diesel prices. This statement of Minister Traikov was countered by the sharp reaction of Prime Minister Borissov who criticized Traikov on account of the demanded information. In the opinion of the Prime Minister, such information has to be public for the Cabinet, because the Bulgarian state has a representative of its own in this company. The friendly relations of Prime Minister Borissov and the President of the "Lukoil" Oil Refinery, Valentin Zlatev, however, are but a public secret, and this is the reason why many observers interpreted the reaction of the Premier as some sort of a "behind the scene" intervention on the part of Zlatev.

The issue of fuels was subject to discussion by all major political parties in the country as well. The BSP said that the government had to intervene more seriously in the regulation of the fuel market, since it was the ordinary consumers that suffered most in the current situation. The leader of DSB, Ivan Kostov, focused his attention on the monopoly situation in this sector of the economy. He qualified "Lukoil" as one of the monopoly structures, which strangled competition and drove away foreign investors from Bulgaria. In his opinion, "Lukoil" was the only company, which had excise duty warehouses at its disposal for the storage of imported liquid fuels, and this made it impossible in practice for other market players to import this commodity and sell it at competitive prices.

In practice, "Lukoil" operates as a market monopoly indeed, as it enjoys the largest share of the fuel market in Bulgaria. Its competitors are smaller companies of fuel importers. In this way, the prices of petrol and diesel in this country are way higher than the prices, which oil refineries command in a number of other European countries.

The subject matter concerning the construction of the "Belene" Power Nuclear Plant has been one of the topical themes over the past quarter once again, and it even managed to provoke a row within the governmental circles. Minister Traicho Traikov accused the Managing Director of the National Electricity Company, Krassimir Parvanov, of havong signed an agreement with the Russian partners in connection with the "Belene" NPP concerning the extension of the deadline for completing the negotiations by another three months, whereby a recommendation was made that with the expiration of the deadline the transaction had to be initialed. Traikov said that Parvanov had done so despite

the explicit ministerial ban. Subsequently, it turned out that the Minister of Finance, Simeon Dyankov, had given permission to Parvanov to sign the agreement. It also became clear that this agreement contained no binding provisions for signing the final contract with the Russian party. The ensuing situation, however, showed that there was a lack of communication between the individual members of the Cabinet and a lack of precise and clearly outlined responsibilities, which the ministers had to perform with respect to specific policies and sectors of the economy. On the other hand, what was also observed was the growing isolation of Minister Traikov and the transfer of some of his responsibilities over to Minister Dyankov. What happened in the final account was that Krassimir Parvanov was released from his post following a decision made by the Bulgarian Energy Holding.

As far as the "Belene" NPP is concerned, Prime Minister Borissov said that the project would be completed only if the price of the electricity generated there, at which the country sells it to foreign buyers, was advantageous for the Bulgarian state. Experts on this subject matter, however, are categorical that such electricity cannot be sold at a profit, because that would mean to set the export price of electricity at the exorbitant level of 10 or 12 Eurocents per kilowatt/hour. On the other hand, Bulgarian experts say that currently the country does not need to construct such additional electricity generating facilities. According to insiders, this project is backed up by lobbyist interests, which run counter to the Bulgarian national interests.

The government signed a contract with the Consultancy Group of the British HSBC Bank, which has been entrusted with the task of performing an analysis on the economic effectiveness of the "Belene" NPP project. The government said that the final decision on the fate of the project will be taken on the basis of the conclusions made in the feasibility study of the consultant.

All these maneuverings reveal the fact that the Cabinet's strategy is to protract this project until the time when the new EU requirements for the safety of nuclear power facilities are agreed and finally approved. It is only then that the country will be able to substantiate its withdrawal from the project without the danger of losing money, should possible international arbitration proceedings be initiated, which entails the payment of substantial compensations to the Russian side. In this connection, the Cabinet demanded that the project negotiations be frozen anew for another three months after the 30th of July, so that the British HSB Bank could complete its expert analysis. The agreement for this postponement was finally signed on July 1st 2011, giving the consultant sufficient time to assess the feasible future price levels of electricity in the region.

A number of replacements in the government took place over the past quarter. The Minister of Transport, Alexander Tzvetkov, handed in his resignation, explaining it with personal motives. At the same time, however, this resignation was expected and for several months had been subject to discussions in the public environment. Some of the reasons for this resignation are both the extremely precarious financial situation of the Bulgarian State Railway Company and the poor appropriation rate of resources extended through the European structural funds and the Transport Program. Tzvetkov was replaced by the MP from the GERB parliamentary faction, Ivailo Moskovsky. This appointment, however, gained the support of the GERB and Attack parties only.

One of the most problematic ministries with the highest number of replacements since this government came into office continues to be the Ministry of Healthcare. A yet another

replacement took place there: the Deputy Minister Michail Zortev handed in his resignation. Despite all the re-shuffles carried out thus far, the problems in the area of healthcare remain unresolved, and the long-awaited reforms have failed to materialize as promised.

The Deputy Minister of the Economy, Energy and Tourism, Mariy Kossev, parted with his post as well. Kossev will be remembered as one of the greatest skeptics with respect to the "Belene" NPP project and with his stance that Bulgaria should refrain from binding itself with long-term contracts with the Russian Gazprom Company. It was Mariy Kossev who first officially confirmed that the President of the "Lukoil" Company, Valentin Zlatev, took part in the negotiations for the "Belene" NPP in Moscow in the capacity of a consultant to the Russian "Rossatom" Company. The dismissed Deputy Minister made a comment that his removal might be connected with the "Belene" NPP project and made the assumption that he could have infringed certain interests in the area of power generation. The official motives for his removal, however, are radically different. According to Minister Traicho Traikov, in performing the duties of his post, Kossev was acting in the capacity of an expert rather, while the post of a deputy minister required much more the presence of a political figure. Delyan Dobrev, an MP from the GERB parliamentary faction, was appointed as a replacement to Mariy Kossev.

The Director of the National Social Security Institute, Christina Mitreva, was also dismissed because of the poor collection rate of the social security contributions. The Minister of Finance, Simeon Dyankov, declared that another replacement could also take place – that of the Director of the National Revenue Agency (NRA), Krassimir Stefanov, should the functioning of the Agency fail to improve. For the time being, however, the people who parted with their posts were the directors of the regional NRA divisions only.

Despite the re-shuffles carried out in the sectors of education, healthcare, and agriculture, the problems there persist. According to experts, the poor appropriation rate of the European funds could hardly be solved within a medium-term perspective, because it has become apparent that the country lacks both the necessary knowledge and capacity for this.

In the sector of the economy, companies continue to declare bankruptcy and the overall company indebtedness has been rising. It is the business sector that accounts for the highest percentage of bad loans to the banks. The reported level of the unemployment rate during the past quarter stood at 12 percent, although it is traditional for the summer months to see a decline of the unemployment rate, because of the seasonal employment.

Apart from the problems mentioned above, the banking system in the country remains stable and Bulgaria, on the whole, enjoys one of lowest rates of foreign indebtedness in Europe and a low budget deficit.

The low foreign indebtedness and budget deficit, however, failed to abate the criticism, which the opposition launched to the governing majority. In the middle of June, the BSP and the MRF tabled a non-confidence vote to the Cabinet on account of its failure to introduce and pursue adequate anti-crisis measures. As expected, the non-confidence vote was refuted by the votes of 124 MPs, these being the votes of the members of the GERB parliamentary faction and the independent MPs who formerly belonged to the parliamentary factions of the OLJ, the Attack Party, and the MRF. The representatives of the Blue Coalition and the Attack Party had earlier left the plenary hall, officially refusing to participate in this voting procedure.

The latest non-confidence vote revealed that in practice the GERB Party has now come to independently avail of a majority of its own, because it can rely on the support of the independent MPs. This changes the political situation in the country and is likely to have long-term consequences concerning the nature and relationships among the major parliamentary represented parties.

The debates around the non-confidence vote did not take long. The MPs were not eager to talk much and what was impressive was the unsubstantiated absence of Prime Minister Borissov from the plenary hall. Answering a question of a journalist about his absence from Parliament, Prime Minister Borissov said that "they are not a pretty sight to look at", meaning the opposition MPs. Political observers qualified this conduct as disrespectful to the Bulgarian National Assembly.

At the end of June, the Cabinet passed a decision to increase the level of the minimum salary in the country from BGN 240 to BGN 270 (i.e. from EUR 120 to EUR 135) and the pensions of surviving spouses by 6.5 percent as of September 1st 2011. The opposition qualified this measure not only as a far belated one, but as a pre-election move on the part of the governing majority as well.

The Electoral Code came to top the agenda once again, now that the Constitutional Court has declared several of its texts to be anti-constitutional, having been addressed on the issue by both BSP and MRF MPs. Thus for instance, what has been repealed is the text, according to which municipal councilors and mayors can be elected only by Bulgarian citizens who have lived for the last 12 months in the respective settlement. Another repealed text is the condition for a 12-month mandatory residence for every citizen of an EU member country, who is not a Bulgarian citizen, in order to be rightfully qualified to vote at elections for municipal councilors and mayors. The requirement for MEP candidates to have lived for the last two years before MEP elections either in Bulgaria or another EU country has also been proclaimed anti-constitutional. Another repealed text is the one about the experimental on-line vote, which was envisaged to take place for the first time ever in this country at the forthcoming elections this autumn. Among the anti-constitutional texts are also those, which envisage the decrease of the number of municipal councilors, as well as the text that a municipal councilor, who has left or has been excluded from a given municipal council faction, is due to become an independent councilor and cannot be accepted as a member of another faction.

In the middle of June a decision was made to hold both the presidential and local elections on the 23d of October 2011.

In June, the former European Commissioner Meglena Kuneva announced that she would run as a presidential candidate at the election this fall. Her nomination was raised by an initiative committee made up by popular personalities and politicians. Kuneva declared that she was not going to seek any party support, but would rather rely on the Bulgarian voters. Although she was closely connected with NMSP for the last decade, Kuneva is now making an attempt to promote herself as a supra-party candidate. Kuneva's team includes figures and activists connected with NMSP. The former NMSP leader, Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, openly gave support to her candidature as well.

Despite the approaching date of the elections this fall, the presidential candidates of the two biggest parties – the GERB Party and the BSP – have not been disclosed yet. This indicates that the stake at this election will be great indeed, although – according to the Constitution – the Bulgarian President is en-

trusted with more or less representative powers and functions mainly.

2. Situation and Development of the Party System in Bulgaria

The development of the party system over the coming months will be determined by the electoral competition among the major parties in the country with a view to the upcoming local and presidential elections. The strategies of the various parties for rivalry and cooperation will shape up the nature of the elections and will also outline the future models of interaction among them on the national level of representation.

2.1. Trends within the Right-Wing Political Environment

With the approaching elections, the relationships within the right-wing political environment are getting g increasingly more competitive. The willingness of the smaller right-wing parties to emancipate themselves from the impact of the GERB Party makes them especially critical to the governance of the country. For the first time since the term of office of the incumbent government began, an exacerbation is observed in the relations between the GERB Party and the Attack Party, the latter of which had acted until recently as GERB's most loyal ally.

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

The main dilemma, which the GERB Party is facing from an internal party point of view, continues to be the party nomination for the presidential election. This issue failed to be solved over the past quarter as well, and thus it became subject to various comments and speculations. For a long time, the name of Prime Minister Boiko Borissov was one of the possible nominations most frequently discussed in the public environment. The occasion prompting these surmises was one of the media appearances of the Deputy Prime Minister, Tzvetan Tzvetanov, who announced that Boiko Borissov was one of the candidates considered at different internal party forums. Borissov himself initially said that it was natural and hardly surprising for the name of a leader of a party to be among the possible nominations for a presidential race.

According to the constitutional texts, the Bulgarian President is vested with limited powers. In this sense, the candidature of Prime Minister Borissov – the leader of the largest party in the country, which enjoys a solid parliamentary majority – does not seem justified. Many observers qualified this idea as an act of fleeing from the responsibilities of governance. At the same time, Borissov's nomination is laden with numerous risks from an internal party point of view, too, no matter which of the two possible scenarios – election victory or loss – actually gets materialized. The situation, in which Borissov comes victorious out of the presidential election, could imply inevitable shocks within the party and the government alike. The opposite hypothesis – should Borissov lose this election – could imply that this would open up the door to an early general election.

These hypotheses have been analyzed within the GERB Party as well and the party seems to have given up this perilous option altogether. At the beginning of June, Boiko Borissov made a statement, whereby he announced that he was not going to run at the presidential election. In all likelihood, the GERB Party will put its stakes on a broadly acceptable non-party candidate. That would be the better strategy for the party, because in the event of a possible defeat, the adverse ef-

fects from the loss would not be that sizeable both for the party and the country's governance at large, as compared to the damages inflicted, should a GERB political figure sustain an election defeat.

Thus far there has been no clarity even with respect to the possible nominations. At the end of June, Borrisov said that he had already decided who the GERB candidate for a presidential nominee would be, but that he would wait for the announcement of this nomination till the beginning of September. Among the possible nominees is the Minister of Regional Development and Public Works, Rossen Plevneliev, who enjoys the highest approval rating in the government. For the time being, however, he has been refusing to confirm that his name is among the nominations, which the party has been considering.

GERB representatives have declared that the local elections are far more important for the party and this is the reason why their efforts will be channeled in this direction precisely. By the end of July, the nominations for local authorities of the party will be quite clear. Boiko Borissov has already confirmed that GERB's candidate in Sofia would be the incumbent Mayor, Yordanka Fandakova.

2.1.2. The Blue Coalition (the UDF and DSB)

The past quarter went under the sign of the contest between the UDF and DSB after their primaries, which had to determine the joint nominations of the two parties for a presidential candidate and a candidate for a Sofia City mayor.

The UDF and DSB came to an agreement that the presidential candidate of the Blue Coalition should be determined at an open election, at which all voters in the country had the right to cast a ballot. The candidate for a Sofia City mayor was determined at an election held for all registered members and supporters of the two parties.

The DSB nomination for the presidential race was Svetoslav Malinov, who is an MEP from the EPP European parliamentary faction, political scientist, and university lecturer. For its part, the National Council of the UDF raised the nomination of the party Deputy Chairman, Roumen Christov. At secret ballot primaries he had already won the presidential nominee contest over the MEP Nadejda Neinsky, former Minister of Foreign Affairs in Ivan Kostov's Cabinet (1997-2001).

Roumen Christov is former Deputy Minister of Agriculture in the Cabinet of Lyuben Berov (1992-1994), Minister of Agriculture in the interim Cabinets of Reneta Indjova and Stefan Sofiansky, counselor of Presidents Zhelyu Zhelev and Peter Stoyanov. Roumen Christov was the main opponent of Martin Dimitrov at the 2009 UDF election for the leadership post in the party. At that time, Christov's adversaries accused him of having close connections with the MRF. Martin Dimitrov, who firmly backed up Christov now, availed the same suspicions back in 2009 during his own campaign for the leadership post in the party.

Underlying these attacks is the fact that at the time of the 2009 election Roumen Christov maintained very good relations with the former UDF Chief Secretary, Plamen Radonov, who – for his part – is a close friend of the MRF MP Christo Bisserov (former UDF Chief Secretary throughout the period of 1997-2000).

It is precisely because of these same suspicions for Roumen Christov's alleged connections with the MRF that Nadejda Neinsky qualified the result from the primaries as "a foregone outcome" and failed to hide her bitterness after the nomination results became clear. Neinsky said that what she ran was "a contract match" prearranged by circles around the leadership of the UDF and DSB.

The UDF leader, Martin Dimitrov, refuted all accusations launched by Nadejda Neinsky.

Opponents at the joint election for Sofia City Mayor nominee of the Blue Coalition were the incumbent mayor of the "Lozenetz:" Sofia region, Proshko Proshkov, nominated by DSB, and Vladimir Kissyov, the nominee of the UDF, who is currently functioning as a municipal councilor at the Sofia City Municipal Council.

Proshkov's nomination was determined on the basis of his victory at the DSB primaries held among all the DSB members from the capital city. His opponent at the primaries was Peter Moskov, municipal councilor at the Sofia City Municipal Council.

The candidates had about a month to prepare their campaigns for the primaries and the subsequent broader joint election. There were misgivings expressed in both parties that because of the open nature of the presidential nominee election other parties and organizations may intervene.

A little over 75,000 voters went to the polls. The presidential candidate Roumen Christov won the contest for the country-wide presidential nomination, having received 42,230 votes. The other candidate, Svetoslav Malinov, received 33,532 votes.

The nomination for a joint Sofia City Mayor candidate was convincingly won by Proshko Proshkov from DSB.

In the capital city Sofia, Svetoslav Malinov received nearly 7 thousand votes more than his rival Roumen Christov. Outside Sofia, the UDF reported relatively weak results in Varna and Stara Zagora. But country-wide, Christov won in 20 regions, while Malinov came victorious in 8 regions only.

These result confirmed the stronger positions of DSB in the capital city and some of the larger towns in the country. For its part, the UDF performed better in the country, mostly because of its better organized party structures there. Despite of these encouraging results, however, both parties proved to avail of limited electoral resources. It is in this sense that Roumen Christov could be said to have insignificant chances for success at the presidential election.

According to Martin Dimitrov, the primaries showed satisfactory results. In his report to the UDF National Council he announced that the potential of the Blue Coalition at the actual elections this fall was more than 300,000 voters.

Over the next few months, the candidates for mayors of the Blue Coalition will be determined in the remaining regions of the country as well. The two parties will give the opportunity to their local structures to decide both the ways of entering coalitions and the nominations of the candidates for mayors. As far as the municipal councilor party slates are concerned, the UDF and DSB will have an equal number of candidate seats. The UDF has already determined its municipal councilor nominees at primaries in the local party organizations. The local DSB organization will hold their municipal councilor primaries in the month of July.

Although one of the goals targeted by the Blue Coalition was to expand the format of the coalition with a view to the local elections, it seems that the differences within the traditional Right Wing will not find a solution at these elections yet again. The reason underlying this conclusion is the fact that several right-wing non-parliamentary parties set up a political alliance called "Alliance of Democratic Forces" (the Bulgarian abbreviation of which – ADF – repeats the abbreviation of the former Allied Democratic Forces). This new structure includes well-known faces and parties, such as: the Union of Free Democrats (UFD) of Stefan Sofiansky, the Democratic Par-

ty of Alexander Pramatarsky, Georgyovden, the Radicals Union of Evgeny Bakardjiev, etc. Representatives of the new alliance said that they have deliberately chosen the abbreviation of the Allied Democratic Forces, because the times of that alliance were the most successful for the Right Wing in Bulgaria to date.

As it seems, the Alliance of Democratic Forces will compete with the Blue Coalition for the votes of the right-wing electorate at the elections this coming fall, although the new formation launched an appeal to the UDF and DSB for nominating joint candidates at the local elections. And yet, in all likelihood the two formations will be adversaries. Thus for instance, the former Sofia City Mayor, Stefan Sofiansky, was proclaimed to be the nominee for mayor of the new ADF, which means the he will directly clash with the candidate of the Blue Coalition, Proshko Proshkov.

Despite the fact that over the last few months the Blue Coalition repeatedly declared its stance in support of a non-confidence vote against the government, should it be tabled on account of its anti-crisis policies, the UDF and DSB MPs preferred to walk out of the National Assembly at the time the non-confidence vote tabled by the BSP and the MRF was voted for in the plenary hall. Representatives of the Blue Coalition said that this move was taken deliberately to indicate that they are at an equal distance both from the incumbent governing majority and the previous governance of the tri-partite coalition, part of which were both the BSP and the MRF.

It is in this connection that Martin Dimitrov appealed to DSB to withdraw its deputy ministers Evdokia Maneva and Konstantin Dimitrov from the Ministries of the Environment and Foreign Affairs respectively, because it was not right for the Blue Coalition to bear the responsibility for the incumbent country's governance. The DSB responded that both Maneva and Dimitrov were appointed deputy ministers in their capacity of experts. This was not connected with any sanction or support on the part of the DSB, and the current ministerial posts of Maneva and Dimitrov were the product of a personal decision made by each one of them individually.

2.1.3. The Attack Party

The Sofia City mosque located in the center of the city does not have sufficient capacity in terms of space to take in all the worshippers gathering for the regular Friday prayers and this is the reason why Moslems also pray outside it on prayer mats placed on the pavement, their prayers being guided by several loudspeakers installed on the outside walls of the mosque. For several years now, representatives of the Attack Party have been trying to drown the sounds of the prayers in the vicinity of the mosque with music and loudspeakers of their own and this finally ended in clashes between committed Attack Party activists and Moslems praying outside the mosque. The violence followed a protest in front of the mosque organized by the Attack in the presence of its party leader, Volen Siderov, and other politicians from the party. The beating left behind many casualties, among whom an MP from the Attack Party. The protesting crowd dispersed the Moslems praying in front of the mosque and put on fire their religious prayer mats. The intervention of the police prevented a further escalation of violence at the scene of the clashes, as well as more serious incidents from taking place.

Volen Siderov accused the Moslems that it was they who provoked the clashes, as they started throwing stones at the protesters. In his opinion, radical Islam has been preached in this mosque for years and this was reason for the Attack Party to go out into the street. Siderov accused the police of having arrested

only activists of the party without having reprimanded even a single Moslem. Siderov went as far as to threaten the Minister of Interior with an imminent demand for his resignation, should he fail to release the Attack Party activists taken in police custody.

The conflict in front of the mosque brought about the immediate reaction of the political parties, a number of non-governmental organizations, and civic structures, which unanimously and sharply condemned this provocation. Firm and critical condemnations were also issued by President Parvanov and the Speaker of the National Assembly, Tzetzka Tzacheva. The National Assembly voted a special declaration condemning these actions, which received the support of all MPs with the exception of the Attack parliamentary faction. The Prosecutor's Office, for its part, launched an inquiry into the case. Some politicians and civic organizations even launched appeals to ban the Attack Party altogether, because the Bulgarian Constitution contains an explicit text, whereby a ban is put on organizations and parties, which instigate ethnic hatred and tension and threaten the internal order in the country.

The clashes in front of the mosque in Sofia elicited angry remarks and criticism on the part of the government, too. Prime Minister Borissov declared that such acts were inadmissible and that the government did not intend to become a hostage of the Attack Party by looking for its parliamentary support at any cost. It is thus that these events brought about considerable tension between the recent allies and it is very likely for the differences between the GERB and Attack parties to deepen over the coming months.

Several events from the past month substantiate such a forecast. Thus for instance, it was with the votes of the GERB Party that the candidature of Volen Siderov to replace Valentin Nickolov at the post of Chairman of the parliamentary Committee for combating corruption was overthrown. Nickolov recently left the Attack Party and became an independent MP and this was the reason why Siderov nominated himself for the post. In response to the second negative vote overthrowing his candidature, Siderov said that by acting like this the GERB Party was about to lose the support of the Attack Party. To prove that these words were said in earnest, the Attack parliamentary faction left Parliament during the non-confidence vote against the government. It is still early days to say whether this has brought to an end Attack's support for the government. To a large extent, Volen Siderov is guided by opportunistic considerations and factors, which are based first and foremost on his narrow party calculations with a view to the approaching elections this fall. At the same time, the GERB Party and the government are hardly likely to seek Attack's support at any cost whatever, because they can now rely on the votes of the independent MPs, who, according to all tale-telling signs, will be supporting the governing majority in the future as well.

The events in front of the mosque can be qualified as a dangerous provocation on the part of the Attack. Over the past years, Bulgaria has always demonstrated a high level of tolerance to the ethnic minorities and was quoted as an example of a country where no ethnic tension exists. Many politicians and analysts pointed out that not only the Attack Party, but also the MRF, could stand to profit from such provocations, as these two parties gain legitimacy from opposing each other.

The possibility for an escalation of such provocations and further radical rhetoric cannot be ruled out with the increasingly closer approach of the October elections. Several other events from the past months are vivid evidence justifying such a hypothesis. Thus for

instance, Volen Siderov interrupted the dinner of the US Ambassador to Bulgaria, James Warlick, in one of Sofia restaurants, in order to hand him a piece of paper with a sum of money inscribed on it, which – in Siderov's opinion – is what the United States is due to pay to Bulgaria for the US bases deployed on Bulgarian territory.

The scandalous acts of the Attack Party provoked varied responses on the part of its MPs. Thus for instance, the People's Deputies Valentin Nickolov, Kiril Goumnerov, and Ognyan Peichev left the parliamentary faction of the party. In the capacity of independent MPs now they explained that this was a step they had taken as an act of differentiating themselves from the acts of the Attack Party, qualifying such acts as "inadmissible for a civilized country", and added that their leaving the Attack parliamentary faction was a decision they had been considering for a long time now.

After leaving the parliamentary faction of the Attack Party, the three now independent MPs disclosed information, which had been circulating in the public environment for a long time, but had not been officially confirmed so far. The MPs announced that shortly before the 2009 general election the candidates for Attack MPs were made to sign guaranty contracts in the capacity of co-signers of loans to the amount of EUR 150,000 extended to five companies registered on the Seychelles Islands.

Valentin Nickolov declared that he was lured into signing such a document with the explanation that the document had no legal value. He specified that the documents were signed in the Head Office of the party on June 12th 2009 – a day before the general election party slates with the Attack Party candidates had to go public. Placing his or her signature under the document, each of the co-signors became a guarantor to the repayment of a loan to the tune of EUR 150,000. In this way, from that day on, the Attack Party MPs were held as hostages to the leader and the party leadership. The facts shared by the three MPs were confirmed by their colleague, Stoyan Ivanov, who said that such documents were signed not only by the members of the parliamentary faction, but also by people who remained outside the National Assembly. Ivanov specified that there were actually two contracts – an individual and joint one. The MPs who left the Attack parliamentary faction said that they would submit the whole of this information to the Prosecutor's Office.

Besides, Nickolov, Goumnerov, and Peichev shared their intention to establish a new party over the next few months with the journalists present at their press-connference.

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

During the period under review, the OLJ Party moved out from the focus of public attention. To a large extent this was due to the discontinued (for the time being at least) flow of compromising information about the governing majority, with which Yane Yanev's party was amply flooding the public environment for a certain period of time.

From an internal party point of view, the most significant event for the party was the unanimous nomination of the Deputy Chairman of the party, Atanas Semov, for presidential candidate. This took place at the Fourth Congress of the party, which was held at the end of June. Atanas Semov is one of the founders of the OLJ and for a brief period of time was Deputy Speaker of the 41st National Assembly. After the Constitutional Court repealed the election results from 23 polling stations in Turkey, Semov had to leave Parliament, because the party mandates were rearranged.

Atanas Semov is a lecturer of European Law at the "Kliment Ochridsky' Sofia University.

The OLJ Congress also nominated the candidate mayors in certain regional centers of the country. The candidate for mayor of the town of Veliko Turnovo is the OLJ MP Emil Vassilev, for Plovdiv – Kiril Kirilov, for Rousse – Plamen Tzvetkov, for Stara Zagora – Lyubomir Vessov.

The candidate mayors for some of the largest towns and cities, such as Sofia, Varna, Bourgas, Blagoevgrad, etc., will be publicly announced next month.

By the end of July, all the nominees for mayors and municipal councilors in all municipalities of the country will also be announced, and the name of the vice-presidential nominee will be made public, too.

At the Party Congress, the leader Yane Yanev once again raised the idea for the need to pass a brand new Constitution of the country. His speech in front of the Congress also contained some purely populist messages, such as – for instance – the idea of raising the level of the minimum pension to BGN 500, urgently raising all salaries and wages, too, and initiating a 50 percent cut of jobs in the state administration.

At the party forum Yane Yanev yet again launched an attack against the governing majority, qualifying Boiko Borissov's government as the most corrupt one in Bulgaria after the democratic changes took place twenty years ago and as a government connected with organized crime and the mafia.

At the end of June, the OLJ leadership announced that they were about to initiate a subscription for organizing a new non-confidence vote against the Cabinet, this time on account of its failure in the combat against corruption and organized crime.

2.2. Trends within the Parliamentary Opposition

The BSP and the MRF tabled a joint demand for a non-confidence vote to the government. Thus far, the two parties have raised a number of joint opposition initiatives at the National Assembly. At the same time, however, it is still unclear whether the two parties will cooperate during the presidential election. For the time being, the MRF is refraining from giving signals as to its conduct and strategy in connection with the presidential vote. For its part, the BSP has not nominated a candidate of its own as yet.

2.2.1. The Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP)

As far as the BSP is concerned, the presidential election will be of an exceptional importance for the future role of the party in the political life of the country. This will be the first election after its 2009 general election defeat, which makes it possible for the BSP to overcome the crisis it plunged into after stepping down from office. It is because of this opportunity precisely that the presidential election is turning into a crucial test, measuring the impact of both the party and its leadership. At this stage, the BSP leader, Sergei Stanishev, has managed to consolidate the party around himself, but a potentially adverse election outcome could well bring into the limelight the issue about his resignation again, and this is an aspiration, which the internal party opposition has proved unwilling to give up to date.

What is important for the BSP at the time being is to prevent GERB from winning the presidential and local elections. After a meeting of the party leadership at the end of May, Stanishev said that the party was considering the idea of giving support to a candidate who could manage to mobilize a maximum number of voters. This is the reason why the

socialists are looking now for a broadly accepted consensual figure, capable of receiving the support of the electorate of other parties, too. According to the leader of the party, the name of the BSP presidential nominee will be publicly announced at the traditional gathering on the Buzludja Peak, where the celebration of the anniversary from the establishment of the party is annually held at the beginning of August.

Influential circles within the BSP, however, insist on raising the nomination of a candidate who clearly belongs to the party. In such a case, however, the party would only attract its hard-core electorate and this will diminish its chances for success.

Some circles within the BSP are considering the possible option of backing up the candidature of Meglena Kuneva, and this seems to be an option to the taste of the party leader Stanishev. Such an option, however, is hardly likely to be to the taste of the hard-liners in the party, for whom the nomination of a proper party candidate is a matter of prestige, not of any party strategies. Should the party overlook this option and in case Kuneva would score a loss at the presidential election, then all the downsides of such a choice will be slammed at the face of Stanishev. These different lines of action and the dilemmas they entail are a clear indication that the BSP is facing a difficult choice indeed.

Currently, the municipal organizations of the BSP are formulating their own nominations, the number of which has now exceeded 40. This is hardly of any particular significance, because it is the political council and the party leadership that will make the ultimate decision.

One of the candidates subject to consideration was one of the most popular faces not only within the BSP, but in the country at large – that of Stefan Danailov, a favorite actor, BSP MP, and former Minister of Culture. His nomination, however, no longer tops the agenda, because Danailov himself declared that he categorically refuses to run for President. The other potential nominees currently under consideration are Plamen Oresharsky, Peter Kurumbashev, Yanaky Stoilov, etc.

The National Council of the BSP approved the nominations of the candidate mayors of 47 municipalities, among which Bourgas, Pazardjik, Pernik, Blagoevgrad, Gorna Oryahovitza, and Sozopol, to name just a few. The BSP candidate mayor of Bourgas will be Pavel Marinov, municipal councilor at the local municipal council. The incumbent Mayor of Pernik, Rossitza Yanakieva, has been nominated for a second term of office, in the towns of Belene and Gotze Delchev the nominees are also the incumbent mayors – Peter Doulev and Vladimir Moskov respectively. The party candidate for mayor of Blagoevgrad is Emil Kostadinov. In Gorna Oryahovita the nominee is Georgi Rachev – director of a transportation company, and in Sozopol – the banker Tihomir Yanakiev. The BSP nominee for candidate mayor of Pazardjik is the lawyer Roumen Petkov.

The endorsement of these names brought about internal tensions in the party. Thus for instance, there were disputes around the nomination of Emil Kostadinov for candidate mayor of Blagoevgrad, as he failed to gain the approval and support of the incumbent Mayor of Blagoevgrad, Kostadin Paskalev, who was among the initiators of the ABC Presidential Movement.

The conference of the Sofia City BSP organization made the decision that the BSP candidate mayor of Sofia, Georgi Kadiev, should lead the party slate of the candidates for municipal councilors as well. However, the majority of the candidates, whom Kadiev would like to work with, were allocated to the non-electable part of the slate.

The BSP Secretary, Envgeniy Uzunov, announced that other sessions of the National Council of the party would be held in the middle of July, when the rest of the candidate mayors of the party would be finally endorsed.

2.2.2. The Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF)

After the exclusion of Kassim Dahl from the MRF, another spectacular exclusion of a politician from the party leadership took place shortly afterwards – that of Korman Ismailov, MP and former leader of the MRF Youth Organization.

Korman Ismailov was one of the very few politicians from the MRF who backed up Kassim Dahl. Among those who voted against the exclusion of Dahl from the party were three representatives of the emigrants to Turkey. That was the reason why the representative of the MRF in Turkey, Enver Hatipoglu, was released from his post as well.

The formal occasion for the exclusion of Ismailov was his presence at the meeting of Kassim Dahl with MRF supporters in the town of Targovishte. Ismailov disregarded the instructions of the central leadership for party representatives to avoid any meetings organized by Kassim Dahl. At the meeting in Targovishte, Korman Ismailov said that the MRF needed a serious internal party reform.

At the meeting of the MRF Central Council, which excluded Ismailov from the party, the latter came up with a declaration of his own. The contents of the declaration was made public by its author shortly afterwards. In the declaration Korman Ismailov says that the MRF "urgently needs democratization and modernization". In his opinion the party is more centralized today than it has ever been during the last ten years. He thinks that the Central Council of the MRF has turned into an organizational body, which "mainly reports on organizational issues and makes superfluous decisions".

In his declaration, Ismailov has included exceedingly critical remarks to Ahmed Dogan. In his opinion, Dogan has repeatedly failed to observe the Statute and programmatic documents of the MRF, undermines the prestige of the party, and the fact that he systematically has failed to perform his duties of a people's deputy has led to a serious erosion of the confidence not only in the leader, but in the party as a whole. Ismailov thinks that Dogan has deprived himself of the moral right to aspire for a new term of office in the capacity of party leader.

After the clashes in front of the mosque in Sofia, the MRF tabled a motion for an amendment to the Penal Code of the country, which should envisage imprisonment from one to four years and a fine to the tune of BGN 5,000 to 10,000, as well as a public reprimand for a crime committed against the religious denominations. The motives for the proposed amendment are that the relevant texts in the current Penal Code contain no minimum thresholds of these punishments. The Draft Bill will be put to consideration in the parliamentary Legal issues committee and the Committee for human rights, religious denominations, and complaints and petitions of citizens.

Ahmed Dogan went on a tour in the country in order to rally and consolidate the MRF party ranks. During one of his visits, Dogan commented on the subject matter of the presidential election and made a yet another of his provocative statements by saying that without the support of the MRF the next President of the country cannot be possibly elected. Actually, during the recent years, the presidential election to a large extent has been decided with the support of the MRF, because the party has a hard-core electorate, which is easy to mobilize on the basis of the well organized pa-

tronage structure. At the same time, however, such statements are viewed with substantial criticism by nationalist formations such as the Attack Party, for instance, and this further exacerbates the political dialog in the country.

For the time being, however, it is still unclear what strategy the MRF will adopt at the forthcoming presidential election. One of the possible options is for the party to run the election with a presidential nominee of its own, as it did back in 2001, when the MRF presidential candidate was Reneta Indjova. Such an option is advantageous for the MRF, because – should the election come to a runoff – it can then decide which of the runners-up merits its support with a view to the specific political set-up.

3. Public Opinion

The trend for a declining confidence in the government as a whole and Prime Minister Borissov in particular continued over the second quarter of the year as well. This is what the survey data of the Alpha Research Agency indicate, which have been collected during a national representative opinion poll held at the end of May.

The positive assessments for the Prime Minister have declined by 5 percent (from 40 percent in February to 35 percent at the end of May), whereas the negative assessments have increased by 6 percent to reach 35 percent at the end of May. Indicative for this trend are the attitudes of the respondents, should the general election were held today.

The GERB Party continues to lose electoral support, but nevertheless remains the first political force in the country with an approval rating of 24 percent (in comparison with 26 percent in February). The BSP has stabilized and has even slightly improved its positions –its approval rating has risen from 16.6 percent in February to 17.5 percent at the end of May. The rows within the MRF followed by the exclusion of Kassim Dahl and Korman Ismailov from the party have resulted in a decline of the support for the MRF from 4.9 percent in February to 4.3 percent in May. The Blue Coalition has preserved its positions and has even scored a slight increase of its electoral confidence from 3.4 percent in February to 3.9 percent at the end of May. The Attack Party has preserved its share of 2.5 percent electoral impact, which indicates that the party verges on the threshold of overcoming the electoral barrier or falling below it.

The survey of the Alpha Research Agency shows a sizeable growth of the possible vote in favor of "another party", which reaches 9.8 percent of the total number of voters. This seems to be connected with the willingness of these voters to give support to new political entities to the purpose of finding new political alternatives to the incumbent government.

The trend for a decline in the support rating of the Cabinet continues. The positive assessments for the Cabinet are 19 percent, the negative are 41 percent, and the neutral assessments are 40 percent. According to the Alpha Research data, most critically minded with respect to the performance of the government are the voters of lower incomes, the elderly population, and the citizens from the smaller settlement in the country where the unemployment rate has been traditionally high. The negative attitudes to the government also mark an increase among the representatives of other social groups, such as: petty and medium-size owners employed in the private sector, the free-lancers or independent workers, and the representatives of the middle class in the towns designated to function as regional centers in the country.

The GERB Party has retained its support rating among the voters who report an improvement in their material welfare.

Over the past quarter, the pessimism among the citizens as regards the economic situation in the country has remained at an excessively high level. A very large portion of the Bulgarian population does not expect any improvement in the economic situation both in the country as a whole and on the level of the everyday personal life. The Alpha Research survey shows that 73 percent of the respondents see no economic revival, while 79 percent of the same respondents continue to restrict their consumption.

As far as the attitudes in connection with the presidential election are concerned, currently it is impossible to make any generalized assessments and to outline any plausible trend, mainly because of the fact that the nominees for presidential candidates of major parties, such as the GERB Party and the BSP, have not been made public yet.

The Alpha Research survey indicates that only 28 percent of the respondents express a positive assessment of the possibility for Boiko Borissov to run for President, while 66 percent are of the opinion that he must stay at his current post of Prime Minister of the country. Besides, 33 percent of the respondents regard his possible nomination as a way of accepting higher responsibilities, but 60 percent qualify such a step as flight from the responsibilities of Prime Minister of the country.

Meglena Kuneva has now officially announced her candidature to compete in the presidential contest and in all likelihood she will be one of the serious contenders for the presidential post. Kuneva is entering the presidential race with a relatively high support rating: 34 percent of the respondents have expressed a positive attitude, 46 percent have a neutral position, and 20 percent have given her a negative assessment as a personality and politician. The Alpha Research survey data indicate that to a large extent the positive assessments for Kuneva come from supporters of political parties such as the BSP and the GERB party, and to a much lesser extent – from supporters of the Blue Coalition.

The leaders of all major political parties have marked a bigger or smaller decline of their confidence ratings. An exception to this rule is the BSP leader, Sergei Stanishev, who marks a slight rise of his personal rating – from 15 percent in February to 16 percent in June. This is an indication for the consolidation of the party on the eve of the forthcoming elections.

The greatest decline is observed with respect to the rating for Volen Siderov, the support for whom has plunged from 10 percent to 6 percent. To a large extent this is due to Siderov's outrageous behavior during the clashes in front of the mosque in the center of Sofia.

Ahmed Dogan's rating has remained at too low a level – 4 percent, mainly due to the growth of critically minded attitudes among the MRF voters in connection with the initiatives of Kassim Dahl, which the latter has undertaken of late.

4. Major Conclusions and Forecasts

1. The political situation in the country will be getting increasingly more dynamic and tense with a view to the upcoming presidential and local elections due to take place on October 23[d]. The political parties have already launched their political campaigns, although the official start of the election campaign is due to start this coming autumn.

The activities of the Attack party over the past month were an indication of possible provocations on the eve of the elections, which could further exacerbate the relations among the parties and affect the attitudes of citizens and their motivation to support one or another of the parties running the elections. All signs indicate that the parliamentary op-

position is likely to enhance its criticism to the incumbent government and table new non-confidence votes against Borissov's Cabinet.

2. The continuing trend for a decline in the GERB Party electoral support turns the forthcoming elections into an extremely important event for this party, as, to a large extent, these elections will reveal the level of the genuine electoral support for the incumbent government. This fact makes GERB extremely cautious with respect to the presidential election in particular. The party's presidential nominee will be disclosed as late as the beginning of September, which shows that the party is facing a serious dilemma and is still hesitating how to find its wining formula for running the presidential election.

For the time being, GERB's possible nomination has been subject to numerous speculations. The name of Prime Minister Boiko Borissov was among the various names discussed in the public environment, but such a nomination does not seem justified from an internal party point of view. Many observers qualified this hypothesis as a flight from political and governmental responsibilities. At the same time, such a nomination is highly risky for the GERB Party, because – should Borissov eventually come victorious from the election – this could bring about some significant shake-ups within the party and the Cabinet alike, while a possible loss could trace the way for an early general election.

This is the reason why it is more likely for GERB to put its stakes on a nominee outside the party, which is probably the best strategy for the party to employ, since this will minimize the adverse effects on the party in the event of a possible presidential election defeat.

3. The parties of the Blue Coalition had to go through a direct clash for the votes of the right-wing electorate, which, however, did not result in the development of an effective campaign at their primaries and the subsequent elections, meant to determine the right-wing presidential candidate and the candidate for Sofia City Mayor. The nomination of the UDF – Roumen Christov – was quite a divisive move, which disunited the coalition partners from the UDF and DSB rather than unite them, and this division is hardly likely to bring about the desired unification and joint efforts in the direction of enhancing the support for the traditional Right Wing. On the whole, Roumen Christov does not enjoy the trust and sympathies of both the DSB voters and some of the UDF circles. It is hardly by chance that some of the UDF supporters in Sofia gave their vote for the DSB presidential nominee – Svetoslav Malinov. The tension between the two parties, which exacerbated during the preliminary election campaign, seems to have been overcome at the time being. Despite this fact, however, possible disagreements may occur in connection with the nominations for mayors in some of the regions in the country.

4. The disgraceful behavior of the Attack Party over the past three months confirmed the forecasts that it was going to pursue an aggressive election campaign. Its actions in front of the mosque in the capital city contradict all major democratic values and principles, and infringe basic human rights. With the approach of the elections this fall, new provocations on the part of the Attack cannot be ruled out.

Three MPs recently walked out from the Attack parliamentary faction and other Attack MPs may well follow suit. What has become clear are the mechanisms put in place to control the people's deputies elected on the Attack party slate. This fact will further enhance the discontent simmering within the party. The latest opinion poll surveys indicate that the Attack Party has been losing its electoral impact. The splits within a number of regional organizations have continued over

the past few months as well, whereby some of the local Attack structures are currently joining other political parties. This portends a poor election outcome for the Attack Party at the upcoming local elections this fall.

At the same time, Volen Siderov currently enjoys a very low public approval rating and this underlies the likelihood for him to perform at the presidential election way below the result he scored five years ago. And it is this prospect actually that has prompted the move towards the observed radicalization of the party.

5. During the past few months the OLJ Party moved out from the focus of public attention. To a large extent this was a targeted move undertaken by the party leadership and was meant to minimize the downsides, which the party had piled up in the preceding year under the spotlight of media and public attention. With its conduct thus far, the OLJ managed to build a public image of a party backed up by shady business structures, which pursue an agenda of their own. The reasons underlying this unpleasant image are the lingering doubts about the party's close relationship and bonds with Alexei Petrov. All this logically resulted in the declining confidence in the party and the receding popular support for it. The approaching elections this fall are extremely important for the future of the party. The nomination of the party's Deputy Chairman, Atanas Semov, for its presidential candidate is a yet another move, with which the OLJ Party is making an attempt to regain its lost electoral confidence, inasmuch as Semov is a very good public speaker and is capable of winning the support of certain strata of the voters.

6. This fall's presidential election is of a paramount significance for the BSP, as it is the corner-stone for the future of the party and its leadership. Having lost the 2009 general election, the BSP can now avail of the opportunity to manifest that it is a political entity capable of regaining the confidence of voters. Therefore, the major goal of the BSP at the time being is to prevent GERB from winning the presidential election. This is the reason why the party is ready to seek various options, which will make it possible for it to find the most appropriate formula conducive to the accomplishment of this task.

The BSP is facing the intricate dilemma whether to give its support to Meglena Kuneva in the presidential race, or to nominate a candidate of its own in order to run the election. There are sufficient arguments in favor of both these options. The Kuneva option would mean a guaranteed run-off, whereby an even broader support for her candidature could be sought on the basis of the anti-GERB vote. The Kuneva option, however, will bring about critical responses from both the hard-line socialists and Stanishev's internal party opponents who insist on a nominee connected with the Left Wing.

Should Kuneva fail at the presidential race, the BSP leader, Sergei Stanishev, will be held to account and this may bring about his replacement. Should Kuneva win, however, both Stanishev and the BSP can capitalize on the success by claiming that they have contributed to GERB's election defeat.

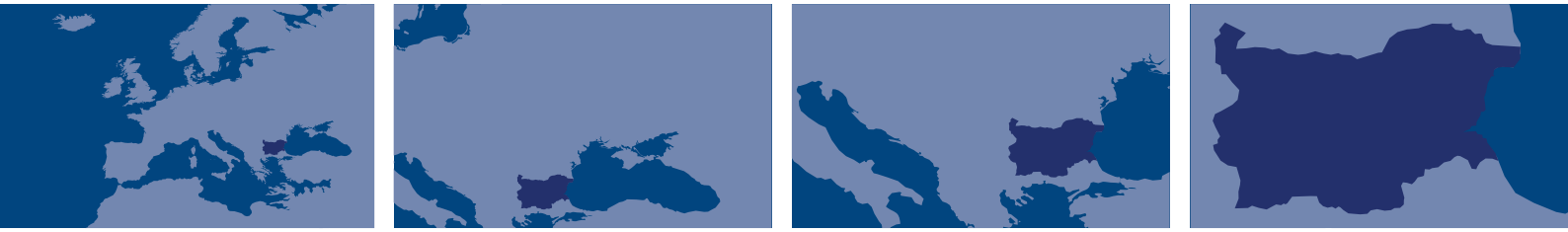
7. At the time being, the MRF is solving its internal party problems connected with the activities undertaken by Kassim Dahl. Over the past few months, Dahl has been touring the countryside in an attempt to rally the members and supporters of the Movement against the MRF leadership and its leader, Ahmed Dogan, in particular. This is an extremely cumbersome task, because over the past years the MRF has grown into a patronage party by establishing structures exerting a powerful economic impact in various regions of the country, through which it controls its own electorate.

For the MRF the local elections are far more important than the presidential election is and this is the reason why the party will focus its efforts on the local election campaign, its major objective being to preserve the positions in the local authorities, which the MRF has enjoyed thus far.

The support of the MRF may prove decisive, should the presidential election come to a run-off. The presidential election is important for the MRF to the extent to which it can enter negotiations and arrive at agreements with other political parties in order to secure for itself an advantageous position with a view to the future restructuring of the party system in the country and the formation of a new governmental alternative during the next two years remaining until the regular general election in the country is due to take place. This was the strategy, which the MRF employed back in 2001, when it gave its support to the BSP presidential candidate, Georgi Parvanov. This move led to the pay-back in 2005, when after the general election it was the MRF together with the BSP that formed the foundation of the tri-partite governing coalition.

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 Profesor 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