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# BAROMETER

## Political Parties Development in Bulgaria

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■ The upcoming elections due to be held on October 23d will take place in a tense situation prompted by the strongly exacerbated relations between the governing majority and the opposition. The election campaign on the local level and especially on the national level will run under the sign of all parliamentary represented parties standing against the GERB Party, as all of them – with the only exception of the MRF – have nominated presidential candidates of their own.

■ The upcoming presidential election is extremely important for the GERB Party because it will actually reveal what the public assessment for their governance is. The victory of the GERB Party nominees will consolidate the positions of the government. An election defeat, however, could bring about an enhanced pressure on the part of the opposition and will consequently result in a fresh regrouping of the political parties in the country along the lines of support/opposition attitudes as regards the GERB Party.

■ Opinion poll surveys indicate that Rossen Plevneliev, the GERB Party presidential nominee, is currently the runner-up among all the rest of the presidential nominees. This, however, does not mean that the election outcome is a foregone conclusion. The major challenge Plevneliev is facing at present is his own capacity to build up the image of a nation-wide politician in the course of the short election campaign, as well as the image of a person capable of coping with the challenges of the presidential post.

■ The upcoming presidential election will also map out the prospects for development of the BSP over the next year and are especially important from an internal party point of view. The BSP presidential nominee, Ivailo Kalfin, is a person to whom the BSP electorate has not given an unequivocal assessment thus far. With the nomination of Stephan Danailov as Kalfin's running mate on the BSP presidential ticket, however, the consolidation of the left-wing voters now seems to be an achievable task. A possible adverse result for the BSP and especially a defeat by Meglena Kuneva will exacerbate the party infighting and will give sufficient reasons for Stanishev's opponents to surge up.

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## 1. The Political Situation

The political situation during the third quarter of 2011 was determined mainly by the upcoming local and presidential elections. The names of the major contenders for the presidential seat have been made public now. The Central Election Commission (CEC) has registered a total of 18 presidential candidates with their vice-presidential running mates respectively.

The highest chances for success are attributed to the following candidates: Rossen Plevneliev, nominated by the GERB Party, Ivailo Kalfin, nominated by the BSP, and Meglena Kuneva, who is running the election as an independent presidential candidate. In all likelihood, none of the candidates would be able to declare victory at the first leg of the election and the presidential vote would be decided at a run-off. According to all opinion poll surveys, Rossen Plevneliev is currently the runner-up and almost certainly he seems to be one of the two participants in the run-off of the presidential election. For the time being, Kalfin and Kuneva are running neck-to-neck, which makes the contest between the two of them even keener.

Kuneva continues to impose her image of a supra-party candidate and all of her rhetoric is directed at criticizing the parties, despite her long-standing bond with NMSP until recently. She has repeatedly stated that she was not looking for any party support, although elections thus far have always been won by party candidates. Kuneva, however, relies on the extreme disillusionment of the Bulgarians with all the parties and hopes that the strategy she pursues in the capacity of an independent candidate will bring her success. At this stage she is putting her stakes on meeting

voters all over the country. In the course of the election campaign Kuneva also received the support of Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha who declared that voters should cast their ballots for personalities rather than for parties and their cadres.

The presidential election became a yet another occasion for reflection on the subject matter concerning the prerogatives of the Head of State and this is likely to become one of the topical themes of the current election campaign. Much like his predecessor Zhelyu Zhelev, President Georgi Parvanov announced his stance in favor of enhancing the presidential powers and prerogatives. In his opinion, what is needed is a constitutional amendment, which makes it possible for the President to summon referenda. Furthermore Parvanov thinks that the weight of the presidential veto should be enhanced as well.

Yet again, the upcoming elections put the subject matter of vote purchasing back on the agenda. Investigating journalists revealed a number of schemes for organized vote purchasing in several regions of the country. This indicates that these vicious practices will not be discontinued during the election campaign for the October local elections either, despite the fact that such acts have now been criminalized by an amendment to the Penal Code. For the first time ever during election time, a joint unit between the Ministry of Interior, the National Security Agency, and the Prosecutor's Office has been set up to the purpose of guaranteeing the legality of the elections and preventing vote purchasing.

There have been growing concerns about possible abuses at these dual – presidential and local – elections. The opposition even went further by voicing misgivings about possible forgeries and pressure intended to rig

the elections, which will be facilitated due to the fact that the Minister of Interior, Tzvetan Tzvetanov, is heading the election headquarters of the GERB Party. Concerns were also expressed that the police could be used to political ends in order to manipulate the popular vote. Representatives of the MRF even appealed for inviting foreign observers to monitor the elections.

The BSP leader, Sergei Stanishev, qualified the functioning of the municipal election commissions as lacking transparency. He also added that they performed in contradiction to the provisions of the Election Code. In his opinion, the strings of the municipal election commissions are pulled by the local GERB Party leaderships, to whom the commissions are actually subordinated. According to Stanishev, constant obstacles are being raised to the registration of opposition party slates, as well as to the registration of candidates for mayors, who are either independent or represent other political forces.

The Blue Coalition also accused the governing party of making attempts to influence the vote. The occasion prompting these accusations was the decision of the Municipal Election Commissions in the towns of Montana and Dobrich, where the registration of the Blue Coalition candidates was rejected. In the town of Pleven, the incumbent mayor, Naiden Zelenogorsky, who belongs to the Blue Coalition, was forced to run the election with the registration of Bulgarian New Democracy (BND). The reason for such a registration is that without even warning him his opponents had registered a "Pro Zelenogorsky" coalition at the municipal election commission. Zelenogorsky declared that he would be seeking to defend his rights at the Strasbourg Human Rights Court.

In the middle of July, Parliament turned down the non-confidence vote against Borissov's Cabinet, tabled by the BSP and the MRF. This time the non-confidence vote was demanded on account of the "failures" in the internal order policy of the country. With 143 votes against, 91 votes in favor, and 1 abstention, the third non-confidence vote failed to oust the incumbent government. Apart from the GERB Party MPs, the rest of the votes in support of the government came from the Attack Party and 12 independent Members of Parliament. The opposition nonetheless managed to voice its criticism from the plenary rostrum by tearing apart the government's policy in the areas of: internal security and public order, the postponed accession to the Schengen Area, the police violence, and the infringement of basic human rights.

The latest European Commission Report under the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism on the country's progress with the judicial reform, the combat against corruption and organized crime was issued in July. Yet again, the findings it makes stress upon the lack of convincing results in the area of combating corruption in the higher corridors of power and the lack of transparency and reliability in the judiciary appointments. The report expresses serious concerns about the accountability of the judiciary and respectively recommends that mechanisms be set up to improve the combat against organized crime. Subject to criticism was also the practice of the Ministry of Interior to receive donations by natural persons and legal entities.

Following the criticism in the European Commission Report about the donations made to the Ministry of Interior, a decision was made to discontinue this practice. The possibility for municipalities to make such do-

nations, however, remains open. The opposition said that this possibility would be an indirect way for natural persons and legal entities to continue funding the police.

Despite the criticism of the European Commission concerning the appointments in the judiciary, Parliament appointed questionable figures such as Kiril Gogov and Nestor Nestorov members of the Supreme Judicial Council by virtue of the votes of the GERB Party and the Attack Party MPs.

Even though Bulgaria had fulfilled the technical criteria for joining the Schengen Area, Bulgaria's problems with corruption prompted the Netherlands and Finland to impose a veto on the country's accession to Schengen. The postponement of Bulgaria's membership in the Schengen Area gave rise to mutual verbal attacks and accusations between the governing majority and the opposition and it is highly likely that this postponement will be further used in the course of the election campaign.

The BSP MP, Roumen Petkov, declared that what the postponement of Bulgaria's accession to the Schengen Area signified was first and foremost the total failure of Bulgarian diplomacy and the person accountable for this was the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nickolay Mladenov. Meglena Kuneva appealed to the government to take the political responsibility for this fact and demanded that the respective resignations be duly handed in.

Nickolay Mladenov responded to this criticism with the explanation that the postponed accession was "extremely unjust". In his opinion it was mainly due to the domestic political situation in both the Netherlands and Finland, as well as to work poorly done by the previous governments.

## **2. Situation and Development of the Party System**

The development of the party system in the country will depend to a significant extent on the outcome of the presidential and local elections. The restructuring of relationships between the major political forces is currently underway and the new alliances and blocs formed among the parties will have much clearer outlines after the elections.

### **2.1. Trends within the Right-Wing Political Environment**

The situation in the right-wing political environment is becoming increasingly more dynamic. The forthcoming elections turned the right-wing parties into rivals not only on the national, but on the local level as well. A major change can be forecast to occur shortly in the Blue Coalition, the future of which is rather dubious, now that the relations between the UDF and DSB are in quite an exacerbated state.

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

The nomination of Rossen Plevneliev as presidential candidate of the GERB Party seems logical with a view to the development of the political situation over the past months. Plevneliev is the person enjoying the highest confidence rating among all the ministers in the Cabinet and the party hopes that this fact will secure the electoral success of their candidate. Before he was appointed to the post of Minister of Regional Development and Public Works, Plevneliev was in the construction business both in Bulgaria and Germany. In 2007 he was elected to sit on the Board of

Directors of the Confederation of Employers and Industrialists in Bulgaria. Since 2008 he has been member of the Board of Directors of the American Chamber of Commerce. Before joining Boiko Borissov's government, Plevneliev has never been engaged with politics. Even in his capacity of a minister he has always repeated that he is not a politician but an expert who intimately knows the construction business.

The nomination for Plevneliev's running mate on the GERB Party presidential ticket is Margarita Popova, the incumbent Minister of Justice.

Plevneliev declared that in the capacity of the country's President he would do his best to attract foreign investments to the country, using to this end the format of the Presidential Council for Economic Policy. Plevneliev pointed out that in order for this to happen, however, what the country needed was a well functioning judicial system. What Plevneliev mentioned next was the need for improvement of the administrative services by setting up an effective e-government. In his words, the e-government is one of the successful instruments conducive to curbing corruption in the lower echelons of civil servants working at the governmental institutions and the country's administration at large. According to Plevneliev, should all these measures be actually applied, the business climate in the country would substantially improve.

Shortly after Plevneliev's nomination was made public, his name was involved in a row. What prompted it was a public statement made by Tzvetan Tzvetanov, head of the GERB election headquarters, that in 2007 three then municipal councilors sitting at the Sofia City Municipal Council demanded to receive EUR 500 thousand from Plevneliev for a deci-

sion connected with the Sofia Business Park. At that time Plevneliev was the representative of the German company Lindner, which was entrusted with the construction of the said business park. The information voiced by Tzvetanov raised the question why neither he, nor Plevneliev ever informed the law enforcement authorities about the demanded bribe. The Prosecutor's Office said that they would take the initiative to investigate this case.

The subject matter was immediately taken up by the BSP, representatives of which said that incumbent municipal councilors from the GERB Party were involved in the case. The BSP candidate for Sofia City Mayor, Georgi Kadiev, disclosed the names of the three and declared that Plevneliev himself had mentioned these names to Peter Kurumbashev, incumbent BSP MP, who at that time was municipal councilor at the Sofia City Municipality. The names announced by Kadiev belong to the following municipal councilors: Orlin Ivanov, Deputy Chairman of the Sofia City Municipal Council, Radoslav Toshev, and the incumbent Sofia District Governor, Danail Kirilov. The three of them denied the disclosed information and said they would sue Kadiev for libel.

Plevneliev said that nobody had asked him personally to provide such a bribe and that he had heard about this from third persons. Tzvetanov never gave a clear answer about the case, which he was the first to mention, and the only thing he said was that what he did was a mistake. Boiko Borissov accused the opposition of fabricating compromising information, but qualified Tzvetanov's statement as a blunder at the same time. The major question to which a clear answer was never given is why the three of the alleged perpetrators were given the opportunity to make a further career within the GERB Party, if infor-

mation about such a case was available to top party officials well before the GERB Party won the 2007 local elections in Sofia and the 2009 general election.

The GERB Party announced two other questionable nominations for local election candidates. In the town of Yambol, the party gave its support to its member and incumbent mayor, Georgi Slavov, who has two convictions from a first instance law-court. Slavov has appealed the convictions and this gives him the right to run the elections once again. The situation in the town of Sliven is quite similar as there the GERB Party has given its support to the incumbent mayor, Yordan Lechkov, who was subsequently convicted to a three-year suspended sentence by the first instance law-court for abuse of office in favor of third parties, whereby the damages for the municipal budget amount to more than BGN 670 thousand.

The GERB Party declared its intentions to make a breakthrough in the ethnically mixed regions of the country, which thus far have always been strongholds of the MRF. This claim is likely to increase the tension between the MRF and GERB not only on the local, but on the national level as well.

One of the declared goals of the GERB Party at these local elections is to win the mayorship race in the three largest cities of the country, namely: Sofia, Plovdiv, and Varna. Yordanka Fandakova, the incumbent Sofia City Mayor, was the expected GERB nominee for a second term of office. In Plovdiv, the nominee of the party is the incumbent district governor, Ivan Todev, who will run against the incumbent Mayor, Slavcho Atanassov, to whom the GERB Party had given its support at the previous local elections. In Varna the support of GERB goes to the incumbent Mayor,

Kiril Yordanov, who has been mayor of this city for several terms of office now and thus far has always been supported by the BSP.

In the town of Bourgas, the incumbent mayor, Dimitar Nickolov, elected from the GERB Party slate, has the highest chances for scoring a victory. The local structure of the Blue Coalition also supports his candidature.

GERB has nominated some of its MPs to run in the mayorship race. In the town of Velinograd, candidate mayor is the GERB MP Angel Daskalov, who took part in the previous local elections as an independent candidate for mayor. Another GERB MP, Ivan Alekxiev, is candidate mayor of the town of Pomorie. In the town of Gotze Delchev, the GERB Party candidate for the mayor's seat is MP Georgi Andonov, and his colleague Svetomir Mikhailov will run for mayor in the town of Balchik. The candidate of GERB at the mayorship race in the town of Stara Zagora is Zhivko Todorov.

Candidates nominated by the GERB Party to run the mayorship race can also be found among the incumbent district governors, such as the District Governor of Rousse, Plamen Stoilov, the District Governor of Razgrad, Valentin Vassilev, and the District Governor of Shoumen, Dimitar Alexandrov.

### **2.1.2. The Attack Party**

At the beginning of July, a yet another Member of Parliament left the parliamentary faction of the Attack Party. MP Stoyan Ivanov declared that by this act he wanted to differentiate himself from the policy pursued by the party leader, Volen Siderov. Earlier, three other Attack Party MPs had left the Attack parliamentary faction, namely: Valentin Nickolov, Kiril Goumnerov, and Ognyan Penchev. The three of them had also differentiated

themselves from the way the party acted at the time of the clashes between nationalists and Moslems in front of the "Banya Bashi" Sofia City Mosque.

Over the quarter under observation, the Attack Party made some attempts to differentiate itself from the policy of the governing majority. The impression, which these attempts have left in observers, however, is that they are only part and parcel of the election tactic of the party, while Attack's genuine support for the GERB Party remains intact.

From the parliamentary rostrum Volen Siderov read a declaration, the purpose of which was to declare that the Attack Party was going into opposition. Siderov said that his party had given its support to Boiko Borissov's government with the idea for the Attack "to be a well-wishing partner" to the GERB Party, but the good intention were not reciprocated. Siderov is of the opinion that GERB's 'governance is threatened by failure as long as it continues to disregard the national interests of the country.

In the opinion of the Attack Party leader, the economic situation in Bulgaria is deteriorating and a large portion of the population is on the verge of poverty. He pointed out that Bulgaria is a social country according to its Constitution, which means that it should not be divided into the stratum of the numerous poor and the stratum of the few rich, but its government should rather maintain a balance between incomes and a stable standard of living for all Bulgarians. According to Siderov, should the policy GERB is currently pursuing fail to change, should the taxation system fail to begin functioning for the citizens rather than for big business, should the agreements with the foreign monopolies, which are draining Bulgarian money, fail to

be terminated, then the collapse of the GERB Party will be guaranteed in the way this happened to NMSP.

At the same time, however, the Attack Party gave its unreserved support to the Cabinet at the parliamentary debate on account of the non-confidence vote in July.

During his election campaign, Volen Siderov emphasized on nationalism as the only doctrine capable of guaranteeing that the country is governed in the interest of the people. In his opinion, people in Bulgaria look at nationalism with distrust, but practice has shown that such pro-nationalist attitudes are gaining momentum in Europe, because people there want to see more sovereignty and nationalism. While what is observed in modern Europe today is a prevalence of attitudes against the opening of the continent for refugees and emigrants, Bulgaria is speaking about neo-liberalism, about smaller government and a market economy, which – in Siderov's opinion – "has been turned into a criminal plunder" of the country's wealth. This is the reason why the Attack Party will insist on bigger government and more state interference in the interest of the people. Siderov launched once again his thesis about the need for the country to regain the state ownership over major sectors of the economy, such as the energy sector, etc.

An event, which occurred in the last week of September, is likely to modify the election campaign of the Attack Party. In the village of Katunitza (Plovdiv District) – the seat of the notorious Roma leader Kiril Rashkov, nick-named Tzar Kiro, a young Bulgarian boy was overrun by a van full of Roma people. The grandson of Kiril Rashkov was involved in the incident. This prompted clashes and riots in the village, as well as an-



gry protest rallies and actions in many towns of the country. This event will most probably be used by Volen Siderov in his election campaign to the purpose of gaining political dividends. Siderov appealed to his opponents in the presidential race to join him in a debate on the subject of Roma crime and the measures needed to solve the issue.

### 2.1.3. The Blue Coalition

On the eve of the presidential and local elections, the relations between the UDF and DSB palpably exacerbated. Although they determined their presidential nominee at primary elections, the UDF and DSB will not run the presidential election in the format of a Blue Coalition. Things escalated that far after the UDF started negotiations with the newly established ADF (Allied Democratic Forces), which encompasses the Radicals Union of Evgeny Bakardjiev, the Georgyovden Movement of Lyuben Dillov, the Union of Free Democrats (UFD) of Stephan Sofiansky, and the Democratic Party of Alexander Pramatar-sky. The negotiations were aimed at securing support for the UDF presidential candidate, Roumen Christov.

DSB accused the UDF of infringing the preliminary agreements signed between the two parties and insisted that if the format of the coalition set up to run at the presidential elections truly gets enlarged, then the ADF must withdraw Stephan Sofiansky as candidate for Sofia City mayor and back up Proshko Proshkov instead, who won the candidate mayor nomination at the primaries of the Blue Coalition in Sofia. The ADF refused to comply with this demand. In the opinion of DSB, the fact that Sofiansky is running for Sofia City mayor is actually directed against Proshko Proshkov, because if the two of them

run for mayor, this will split and dissipate the right-wing vote. In practice, the UDF failed to make any clear comment on the "Sofiansky" case, although Proshko Proshkov is in fact the candidate of the UDF as well, both by virtue of the agreement signed with DSB and as a result of the primaries, which the two parties voluntarily held together.

As a result, DSB refused to participate at the candidate-presidential registration of Roumen Christov with the Central Election Commission (CEC). This is the reason why a new coalition had to be registered, namely: the Union of Right-Wing Forces. Several smaller right-wing formations entered this coalition headed by the UDF. Among its members are the parties from the ADF, the Bulgarian Democratic Forum, and the Allied Agrarians, the leader of which is Petya Stavreva, the Radical Democratic Party, the Bulgarian Social Democratic Party, and Bulgarian New Democracy.

DSB representatives declared that they would honor their agreement with the UDF, they would not register a candidate of their own to run at the presidential election, and would give their support to Roumen Christov.

The newly established coalition came up with a declaration that the presidential election is an ideal opportunity for regaining the genuine right-wing environment in Bulgarian politics. Stephan Sofiansky launched accusations at the DSB leader, Ivan Kostov, in the sense that the conduct of the latter was dividing the Right Wing in Bulgaria for a yet another time. Sofiansky, however, failed to mention the reason why he himself refused to withdraw his own candidature for Sofia City mayor.

The UDF leader, Martin Dimitrov, qualified the right-wing coalition set up for the presidential election as an unprecedented unification of the authentic Right Wing in Bulgaria.

The objective analysis, however, shows that in the new coalition format the UDF will have partner parties of an extremely limited electoral potential and they will hardly contribute to any higher outcome for Roumen Christov at the presidential election. At the same time, the DSB voters are hardly likely to give support to Roumen Christov, despite the declarations made by the DSB party leadership.

Emanuil Yordanov from the UDF was nominated as running mate on the presidential ticket of Roumen Christov. Emanuil Yordanov is former Minister of Interior in Ivan Kostov's Cabinet. For the last few years, Yordanov had chosen to distance himself from active politics.

On the whole, the situation around the UDF and DSB will affect the performance of the Blue Coalition at the local elections. The relations between the two parties remain tense in many regions of the country. In a number of regional centers, the UDF and DSB have given support to different candidates for mayors and there they will not draft any joint party slates for municipal councilors. In some other towns, such as Varna for instance, the tension between the two parties is also quite serious. All this could contribute to an election campaign of low effectiveness and consequently – to a low election outcome.

The distribution of municipal councilor seats and the drafting of the party slate of the Blue Coalition in Sofia also brought about some tension between the two parties. DSB insisted that the distribution of seats on the individual slates should correspond to the results from the mayoral primaries held in Sofia, which Ivan Kostov's party won. The UDF upheld the idea of party representation on a parity basis. It was only on the last day before the deadline for registering the slates at

the Central Election Commission was due to expire that the leaderships of the Sofia City organizations of the two parties reached a consensus and this happened only after the UDF conceded to accept the demands of DSB.

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

Having nominated Atanas Semov for its presidential candidate, the Order, Legality, and Justice Party nominated a woman as a running mate of Semov's on the OLJ presidential ticket. She is Polyana Stancheva, former Director of the Bulgarian National Radio and municipal councilor in Sofia elected on the GERB party slate. Stancheva is not a GERB Party member, even though her name was included on the GERB municipal councilor slate. Currently, Stancheva is one of the critics of the GERB Party and its governance. Stancheva said that she accepted the OLJ nomination because she was convinced that Bulgaria needed both a new Constitution and a change in the governance model, in which the country is currently run. In her opinion, the GERB Party has not discontinued the inadmissible corruption practices and the Sofia City Municipality can be held as a typical case in point illustrating the dire situation.

Surprisingly, the OLJ party slate of the candidates for Sofia City municipal councilors was topped by Martin Zaimov, who was candidate for Sofia City mayor, nominated by DSB and the UDF at the previous local elections, and who is currently municipal councilor in the capital city. The OLJ said that they would back up the candidature of Proshko Proshkov for Sofia City mayor, and Martin Zaimov shared that this support namely was the reason why he accepted the OLJ proposal to top their municipal councilor party slate.

At the National OJ Conference held in the middle of September, the party leader, Yane Yanev, for a yet another time declared that the major objective of the party was the adoption of a new Constitution. The OJ has put forward a number of constitutional amendments, the majority of which are of a populist orientation. Among the amendments the party will work for are: decreasing the number of MPs from their current number of 240 to 100; removal of MP immunity and privileges; and setting up a mechanism for their recall. The OJ also insists that judges and prosecutors should also be deprived of immunity in this country.

The OJ project envisages the implementation of reforms in the judiciary as well, to the purpose of increasing the effectiveness and independence of the system. Thus for instance, one of the envisaged amendments is to remove the political quota in the Supreme Judicial Council. The OJ will also work for providing greater powers to the President, such as legislative initiative, a strong presidential veto, and the right to summon referenda.

## **2.2. Trends within the Parliamentary Opposition**

The relations between the BSP and the MRF will depend predominantly on the fact whether the MRF will actually back up Ivailo Kalfin and Stephan Danailov at the presidential election. The support of the MRF is important for the BSP, because this support precisely could tip the balance in favor of the BSP presidential ticket.

### **2.2.1. The Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP)**

After a lengthy process of internal party nominations, the BSP finally announced its

presidential nominee – Ivailo Kalfin. He is an incumbent Member of the European Parliament and also former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Cabinet of Sergei Stanishev (2005-2009). Kalfin received the approval of nearly 60 percent of the members of the BSP National Council. At the ballot he received 72 votes in favor, while the other major contender for the party nomination – Yanaki Stoilov – received only 35 votes in favor.

Kalfin said that the debate for the upcoming presidential election should be focused on the functions of the Head of State and on the question about what he could contribute to the development of society. Kalfin expressed his concern that if the country's governance continues in the style imposed by the GERB Party of "suppressing the independence of institutions", there is a danger for the presidential institution "to be crushed and turned into a second-rate institution".

Kalfin is of the opinion that the presidential powers do not need to be enlarged. He thinks that "the future president must be looking for national agreement on all the long-term issues and their fundamental frameworks, which should not be affected by the changing majorities coming into office. The President should be seen as a person who seeks consensus on the serious issues existing between the major political forces, but what is extremely important is for the President to seek for the opinion of civic society, either by means of a referendum, or by all other possible means."

The attitude towards Kalfin within the BSP is not unequivocal. In 1997 he left the party and joined the Bulgarian Euroleft headed by Alexander Tomov. Even now he is not a member of the BSP. This is the reason why

the rock-bottom electorate of the BSP does not feel any special sympathies for him. Apart from this, Kalfin took part in the establishment of the ABC presidential project initiated by Georgi Parvanov, which failed to get the approval of certain groups within the BSP.

This is precisely the reason why the BSP had concerns that Kalfin would prove incapable of rallying the entire electorate of the Left Wing and that this fact might even prevent him from reaching the run-off. The latest opinion poll surveys indicate that the distance between him and Meglena Kuneva is very short indeed.

And this precisely became the reason why Stephan Danailov was nominated Kalfin's running mate. The former Minister of Culture in Stanishev's Cabinet was one of the internal BSP nominations for the presidential post, but at that time Danailov categorically refused to run for President. Stephan Danailov is one of the most popular Bulgarian actors and one of the emblematic figures in the BSP. His nomination at this stage aims at the consolidation of the entire Left Wing electorate.

The past quarter clarified several question marks surrounding the political future of President Parvanov after the end of his term of office in the capacity of Head of State. Parvanov himself publicly announced his intention to return to the BSP. The President also mentioned that he was not going to take up the leadership post in the party once again, nor did he intend to run for Parliament. What he wanted to do instead was to help the BSP in its efforts to consolidate the Left Wing in Bulgaria.

What Parvanov's return to the BSP means is that infighting could occur between the various groups and factions within the party. The circle around the leader Stanishev

is skeptically minded with respect to Parvanov's intention to return to the party and sees this statement as a claim on his part to regain the leadership post. At the same time, the group around Roumen Petkov, who is close to the President, hopes to regain its own positions in the party.

It is not by chance that Parvanov announced his intentions publicly on the eve of the elections. The establishment of the "presidential" ABC Movement and the suspicions that after the end of his term of office he was about to set up a new party of his own made the supporters of the Left Wing feel uncomfortable hesitations. With his claim for return to the BSP Parvanov actually consolidated the left-wing electorate just in time for the elections.

### **2.2.2. The Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF)**

The fact that the MRF did not nominate a presidential candidate for the upcoming election was not unexpected. The party has not publicly announced yet whether it will be backing up one of the running candidates. The MRF leadership announced that the local elections are the major priority for them and the presidential election was not on top of their agenda.

In Sofia, the MRF will run the local elections together with "the business party" of Christo Kovachky, namely the LEADER Party. The two parties have registered a coalition under the name of "Liberal Alliance for Sofia" with the Municipal Election Commission. As early as the previous general election observers commented on the close relationship between the two formations and on the fact that it was actually the MRF that stood behind the idea about the establishment of the

LEADER Party. By means of this new alliance now, the MRF is making a first attempt to secure its own representation in the Sofia City Municipal Council.

In the majority of the ethnically mixed regions of the country, The MRF has traditionally nominated candidates for mayors from its own party. In certain regions of the country, the MRF is backing up the candidates for mayors of the Left Wing. Thus for instance, in Varna the MRF has given its support to the candidate mayor nominated by the BSP – Borislav Goutzanov. In the second largest city of the country – Plovdiv, the MRF made its own nomination for a candidate mayor – the MP from the MRF parliamentary faction Petya Raeva.

The MRF also arrived at an agreement for cooperation with Stephan Sofiansky and Evgeny Bakardjiev from the newly established Allied Democratic Forces (ADF). In some regions of the country the two formations will run the local elections with joint candidates. It is even possible for certain structures of the MRF to give their support to the presidential candidate Roumen Christov in some regions of the country due to the fact that the presidential candidate of the Right Wing is very close with the Deputy Chairman of the MRF, Christo Bisserov.

The MRF is keeping a close eye on the local elections and this heightened attention can be explained with the concerns within certain circles of the party that an outflow of votes is possible due to the activity of Kassim Dahl and Korman Ismailov. An announcement was made in the middle of August that Kassim Dahl had laid the foundations for a close cooperation with the United People's Party (UPP) of Maria Kapon for the presidential and local elections. Dahl and Kapon de-

clared that their cooperation would actually be a long-term project, the purpose of which was to create a new right-wing alternative in Bulgaria. The two of them announced that they would register UPP party slates in all the 264 municipalities of the country, and there would also be individual municipalities where they would give support to other right-wing candidates for mayors.

### 3. Public Opinion

The opinion poll survey held between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> of September by the Alpha Research Agency indicates that the presidential candidate of the GERB Party, Rossen Plevneliev, gets the largest share of support at this stage. Out of all the respondents who had declared that they would go to the polls, 38.5 percent said they would cast their ballots for the GERB candidate, Rossen Plevneliev. Second ranking after him comes the presidential candidate of the Left Wing, Ivailo Kalfin, with 23.5 percent of the votes, and third ranking comes the independent presidential candidate Meglena Kuneva, who gets 18.4 percent of the votes.

The rest of the presidential candidates hardly have a chance to go to the run-off. Thus for instance, the leader of the Attack Party, Volen Siderov, and the UDF presidential candidate, Roumen Christov, get about a 4 percent support. The number of respondents willing to cast their ballot for the presidential candidate of the OLV Party, Atanas Semov, amounts to 2.5 percent, and the number of those ready to give their support to the VMRO presidential candidate, Krassimir Karachanov, is 2.2 percent.

During the quoted opinion poll survey, 59 percent of the respondents have expressed the intention to cast their ballots at

the presidential election, and 62 percent indicated their intention to cast a ballot at the local elections.

The opinion poll survey of the Alpha Research Agency indicates that the electoral potential of Rossen Plevneliev comes quite close to the profile of the GERB Party supporters. What merits mention, however, is the fact that Plevneliev gets the support of the intellectuals and the free-lancers, and these are strata of the population where the governing majority has actually been losing ground of late. Besides, Plevneliev is also attracting people who determine themselves as right-wing supporters, whereas the GERB Party is much more of a centrist orientation.

To a large extent, the support measured for Ivailo Kalfin coincides with the Left Wing electorate. The nomination of Stephan Danailov as the presidential running mate is expected to rally and further consolidate the left-wing voters.

The most varied but also the most undetermined is the support measured for Meglena Kuneva. About 14 percent of her supporters determine themselves as centrists, 19 percent – as left-wingers, and 24 percent – as right-wingers.

The opinion poll survey of the Alpha Research Agency indicates that the confidence rating of the Bulgarian Parliament has dropped to an unprecedented low level: only 5 percent of the Bulgarians have given a positive assessment to the work of the National Assembly. According to the records the Agency has, this is the lowest point in the parliamentary confidence rating, which has been regularly measured in the past 15 years.

The confidence rating of the major political parties in the country and their leaders also remains at a low level. Prime Minister Boiko

Borissov continues to enjoy the highest approval rating of 30 percent out of all the other leaders of parliamentary represented parties. Second ranking comes the BSP leader, Sergei Stanishev, who enjoys the approval of 16 percent of the voters. The confidence rating of the rest of the party leaders is within the limits of 6 – 7 percent.

Since the beginning of the year, there has been no change in the approval rating of President Georgi Parvanov, having in mind that he is at the end of his second presidential term of office. He gets the confidence of 28 percent of the Bulgarian citizens, while the number of those who disapprove of him amounts to 27 percent. The other 45 percent of the respondents have given him a neutral assessment.

The attitude towards the government continues to be dominated by negative assessments: its disapproval rating is 36 percent against a 20 percent approval. This indicates that there has been no significant change in the approval/disapproval rating of the government in comparison with the beginning of the summer season.

#### 4. Major Conclusions and Forecasts

1. The upcoming elections will be held in a tense situation because of the strongly exacerbated relations between the governing majority and the opposition. The election campaign at the national level will run under the sign of all parliamentary represented parties standing against the GERB Party, as all of them – with the only exception of the MRF – have nominated presidential candidates of their own.

The fact that the local and presidential elections will be held on the same date is likely to increase the voter turn-out.

Suspicious for possible abuses intended to rig the elections, as well as the vote purchasing practice, will accompany the election campaign. Currently there are no effective mechanisms in place designed to get the nation rid of this extremely negative phenomenon. Besides, the political will capable of countering it is insufficient.

2. The presidential election is extremely important for the GERB Party, because it will actually reveal what the public assessment for their governance is. The victory of the GERB Party nominees will consolidate the positions of the government. An election defeat, however, could bring about an enhanced pressure on the part of the opposition and will consequently result in a new regrouping of the political parties in the country along the lines of support/opposition attitudes as regards the GERB Party.

Opinion poll surveys indicate that Rosen Plevneliev, the GERB Party presidential nominee, is currently the runner-up among all the rest of the presidential nominees. This, however, does not mean that the election outcome is a foregone conclusion. The major challenge Plevneliev is facing at present is his own capacity to build up the image of a nation-wide politician in the course of the short month-long election campaign, building up the image of a person capable of coping with the challenges of the presidential post at the same time. Plevneliev has no political experience, he has always qualified himself as an expert whose knowledge and experience is connected mainly with the construction business. This is the reason why he needs some really serious preparation in the course of the campaign and especially at the election debates, where he will have to face his far better politically prepared opponents

– Meglena Kuneva and Ivailo Kalfin. It is the election campaign precisely that will be the major factor capable of tipping up the scales in one or another direction.

The major objective of the GERB Party at the local elections is to win the cities and larger towns in the country, as well as the greater part of the regional centers. In the capital city, Yordanka Fandakova is the favorite for the mayor's seat, but it is highly likely for the GERB Party to lose its majority in the Sofia City Municipal Council.

3. In comparison with the previous local elections, the Attack Party is certain to lose its current positions. The rows surrounding the party and the fact that entire local party structures have now left it in a number of towns throughout the country will have an inevitable effect on the local elections outcome. In the town of Bourgas, where the Attack Party scored some of its highest election results at the previous local elections due to the support of the SKAT television channel and its owner, Valeri Simeonov, now Attack is likely to suffer a defeat. Simeonov set up a political party of his own, which – in all likelihood – is about to win a more numerous political representation at the Bourgas Municipal Council than the Attack Party can.

Volen Siderov will also be far from the outcome he scored at the previous presidential election when he got to the run-off election. The support he is receiving in this presidential election campaign does not exceed 3 to 4 percent.

On the eve of the elections, the Attack Party has been increasingly closing itself within the circle surrounding the party leader, Volen Siderov, and proves incapable of finding a way to reverse the declining support for the party. Despite the hesitant attempts for

emancipation from the GERB Party and the criticism launched at the government over the past few months, the Attack Party continues to support GERB, which in practice defaces the Attack from a political point of view.

4. The agreements, which the UDF has signed with the newly established Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), strongly exacerbated the relations within the Blue Coalition. Martin Dimitrov's decision to turn for electoral back-up to Stephan Sofiansky and Evgeny Bakardjiev does not seem justified, despite the declared aspirations behind these agreements, namely to obtain wider support at the elections and to facilitate the unification of the Right Wing. The electoral potential of the parties, which set up the new ADF, is insignificant and will hardly contribute to the better performance of the UDF presidential candidate, Roumen Christov. On the contrary, this act on the part of the UDF is likely to deprive the voters of DSB of the legitimate motive to give their support to Roumen Christov.

What is taking place within the Blue Coalition seems to have a deeper purpose and an ulterior motive, namely – the isolation of DSB and Ivan Kostov in particular. The GERB Party will benefit most from such a development, because over the past months Kostov has been one of the loudest critics of Boiko Borissov and his governance. Several times over the past months, both Tzvetan Tzvetanov and Boiko Borissov have demonstrated a friendly attitude to the UDF and its leader, Martin Dimitrov, verbally attacking Ivan Kostov at the same time. It cannot be ruled out for an agreement for future cooperation to have been outlined between the UDF and the GERB Party, whereby the price the UDF will have to pay for such cooperation is its distanc-

ing from Ivan Kostov. It is possible for talks in this vein to have already started.

5. The OLJ is making attempts to establish closer relations with the right-wing formations in the country, which will help its leadership to go out of the political isolation it has relapsed into since the beginning of the year. The support for Proshko Proshkov at the mayoral elections, which the OLJ has pledged, should be regarded in precisely such a perspective. The goal of the party at the upcoming elections is to stabilize its shattered positions. The prospects for development of the OLJ at this stage, however, are rather adverse. Yane Yanev's party is still incapable of shedding off the image, which it has painted of itself due to the close relationship it used to maintain with Alexei Petrov.

6. The upcoming presidential election will map out the prospects for development of the BSP over the next year and are especially important from an internal party point of view. The BSP presidential nominee, Ivailo Kalfin, is a person to whom the BSP electorate has not given an unequivocal assessment thus far. With the nomination of Stephan Danailov as Kalfin's running mate on the BSP presidential ticket, however, the consolidation of the left-wing voters now seems to be an achievable task. A possible adverse result for the BSP will exacerbate the party infightings and will give sufficient reasons for Stanishev's opponents to surge up. President Parvanov's intention to return to the BSP after the end of his term of office in the capacity of Head of State will certainly bring about a shift in the layers within the BSP and is likely to result in a fresh regrouping of forces within the party. A possible election defeat by the GERB Party presidential candidate Rossen Plevneliev would hardly have any dramatic consequences for



the BSP. But should Meglena Kuneva make it to the run-off instead of Kalfin, then this will certainly bring about serious consequences and is likely to result in a replacement of the party leadership.

7. Being predominantly a regional party, the priority for the MRF are the local elections, because it is the MRF local structures that form the very foundations of the party. They are the principal mechanism through which the party controls its electorate, building at the same time a solid network of patronage structures. The MRF will not only try to preserve its current positions in the ethnically mixed regions, but will also direct its aspirations towards expanding its influence. It is in this connection that the MRF sought the

cooperation of the LEADER Party in the capital city Sofia, where the two parties will run the local elections on a joint party slate. The possibility for Kassim Dahl to split votes away from the MRF at present seems to be infinitesimal. Nevertheless, the MRF is attentively monitoring the new alliance set up between Kassim Dahl and Maria Kapon.

The MRF has not disclosed yet which presidential candidate it will support at the first leg of the election, but there are obvious signs that the major objective of the party is to prevent Plevneliev and the GERB Party from winning this election. This is the reason why the MRF is likely to give its support to that candidate in the presidential contest who will be facing Plevneliev at the possible run-off.

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