



Georgi Karasimeonov, Milen Lyubenov (Eds.)

BAROMETER

Political Parties Development in Bulgaria

Vol.11 Issue 4
October – December 2011

■ The victory of the GERB Party at the October 2011 presidential and local elections can be qualified as a confidence vote for the government. One of the reasons for GERB's success is the weakness of the other political alternatives. At the same time, the country needs urgent reforms in the public sector, but thus far the GERB Party has manifested inconsistency in its chaotic efforts to pull them off.

■ The President elect, Rossen Plevneliev, has been making promises of being a proactive and dialog-prone President. But it is only the future that will show whether he could prove capable of emancipating himself from his political patron – the GERB Party leader and Prime Minister Boiko Borissov.

■ The BSP continues to be the second-ranking political force in the country. The 2011 BSP election outcome has shown a certain rise in its overall electoral support, however slight it is, in comparison with the 2009 general election. And yet, the BSP continues to be a party backed up mainly by the older generation and is facing difficulties in attracting supporters belonging to the younger electorate.

■ The election outcome of the presidential candidate Meglena Kuneva indicates that there is a potential for the rise of a new centrist formation in the country, but its actualization will very much depend on the willingness of the former European Commissioner herself to set up such a new political party. For the time being, however, her intentions to this effect remain undisclosed.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. The Political Situation.....	2
2. Situation and Development of the Party System	5
2.1. Trends within the Right-Wing Political Environment.....	6
2.1.1. Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (The GERB Party)	6
2.1.2. The Blue Coalition (made up by the Union of Democratic Forces - UDF and Democrats for Strong Bulgaria - DSB).....	7
2.1.3. The Attack Party	9
2.1.4. The Order, Legality and Justice Party (OLJ)	10
2.2. Trends within the Parliamentary Opposition.....	11
2.2.1. Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP).....	11
2.2.2. Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF).....	12
3. Public Opinion	14
4. Major Conclusions and Forecasts	14

1. The Political Situation

The expectations for a strong protest vote against the governing party failed to materialize and the GERB Party won both the presidential and the local elections. The presidential election went through a run-off phase. At the first leg of the presidential election the GERB candidate, Rossen Plevneliev, won 40.11 percent or a total of 1,349,380 votes. Second-ranking was the BSP candidate, Ivailo Kalfin, who received 28.96 percent or a total of 974,300 votes. This outcome determined the participants in the run-offs, i.e. the presidential candidates of the GERB Party and those of the BSP. Meglena Kuneva remained third, having received the support of 470,808 voters (or 14 percent altogether). The rest of the presidential candidates had fallen far behind. The electoral turn-out at the first leg of the presidential election stood at 51.83 percent, whereas the turn-out at the local elections was a little lower amounting to 48.53 percent.

At the run-off, the MRF gave its support to the BSP-backed Ivailo Kalfin, while Meglena Kuneva appealed to her electorate to follow the call of their own consciousness. The MRF support proved insufficient to fill in the gap between the two top-ranking presidential candidates. Plevneliev won the presidential election by a total of 1,698,136 votes (or 52.58 percent altogether), while the voters who cast their ballots for Kalfin were 1,531,193 (or 47.42 percent altogether). The overall voter turn-out at the run-off stood at 48.04 percent.

The first leg of the presidential and local elections took place in conditions of an unprecedented chaos, which triggered criticism on the part of not only the candidates and political parties running the elections, but also on the part of a number of observers. Despite the relatively low electoral turn-out, queues of voters were lining up outside the polling stations throughout the country, which provoked tensions in front of the ballot boxes themselves. This led to an extension of the official voting time by an extra hour in con-

travention to the provisions of the Electoral Code. The process of submission of the individual constituency electoral protocols to the Central Election Commission was accompanied by difficulties as well. As a result, the announcement of the final official election outcome was also delayed beyond the deadline provided for in the Electoral Code.

It also turned out that the number of invalid ballots was at a record high. Their overall number in the three separate votes – for mayors, municipal councilors, and president – topped 700,000. The invalid ballots cast only during the first leg of the presidential election exceeded 200,000.

All political parties with the exception of GERB expressed their strong dissatisfaction and criticized the way in which the 2011 presidential and local elections were held. The BSP qualified these elections as the worst in terms of organization over the past 20 years. The MRF stated that thousands of Bulgarian citizens were deprived of the right to vote owing to the principle of permanent residence introduced in the Electoral Code and the drafting of the lists imposing a ban on citizens to vote.

The governing party admitted to the existence of certain organizational problems and difficulties at the time of the 2011 elections, but in their opinion they were due to the decision to hold the presidential and local elections on one and the same day.

A number of international observers and Bulgarian non-governmental organizations also made an assessment of the elections with respective critical remarks. The observers from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe qualified the performance of the Central Election Commission as poorly organized and non-transparent. According to the representatives of PACE, what Bulgaria needs to do is to set up a more professional Election Commission, the members of which should be experts of no party affiliation. The PACE representatives also stated that the equality between the candidates running for the presidential post was infringed because

they had not been give an equitable access to the mass media.

The observers from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) have found a serious administrative problem with the "unbalanced composition of the election commissions at all possible levels and the dominating participation of people from the governing party therein". Besides, they have established a number of organizational flaws, which have brought about conditions conducive to the piling-up of voters in front of the polling stations. They have also expressed concerns with respect to the signals about vote purchasing and controlled vote cases.

According to the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee (BHC), the members of the election commissions were unaware of the rules and procedures valid for an election day and thus manifested a very low level of administrative competence. The number of polling stations was insufficient and this resulted in election defilement at a number of places and deprived thousands of citizens from their right to vote. The amassment of many people in front of the polling stations caused voters to wait for long hours and made many of them give up the idea of casting their ballots altogether.

The Bulgarian Helsinki Committee expressed its misgivings with respect to the defilement of vote secrecy as well, because the ballot paper turned out to be transparent. Apart from that, at a number of places, advocates of individual parties openly canvasses votes in their favor right in front of the polling stations.

As a result of repeated signals for various infringements of the electoral procedures, a record number of petitions for annulment of the election outcome were filed with the law-courts. Such law-suits were initiated in Sofia, Varna, Plovdiv, Kurdjali, Kyustendil, Pleven and in a number of other smaller towns of the country as well.

Thus far, it is only the Administrative Court of Veliko Turnovo that has annulled the election of municipal councilors in the town of

Gorna Oryahovitza. The court has accepted the claim that the infringements at the time of the vote have defiled the end result. A number of serious discrepancies between the protocols of the various election commissions and the actual number of invalid ballots at the time of the election have been established with absolute certainty and this is the substantiation in the motives of the court panel ruling in favor of the demanded annulment.

For the first time since the beginning of the democratic changes, the major parties in this country did not acknowledge the outcome of the presidential election and lodged petitions for their annulment. Seventy one Members of Parliament from the BSP, MRF, and the Attack Party filed in a petition with the Constitutional Court demanding that the election of Rossen Plevneliev for President and Margarita Popova for Vice President be declared illegitimate. Among the motives for the annulment of the vote were: the lists of citizens deprived of the right to vote, the transparent ballots, the participation of the Minister of Interior in the electoral process, the illegitimate extension of the polling day, etc. The Constitutional Court accepted that the request was admissible and should be allowed to further proceed on the merits of the claims. In the final account, however, the Constitutional Court failed to annul the outcome of the presidential election, whereby its major motive was the lack of sufficient legal arguments to substantiate such a decision.

The election of Plevneliev and Popova brought about fresh re-shuffles in the Council of Ministers. Plevneliev had handed in his ministerial resignation at the beginning of September, right after his presidential nomination was publicly announced, and was replaced by his deputy at the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works, Liliana Popova. In December, Margarita Popova still in the capacity of Minister of Justice, was replaced by Diana Kovacheva who until that time had occupied the post of Executive Director of Transparency International for Bulgaria.

The deliberations and subsequent passing of next year's government budget was the second ranking event in terms of significance, which was shaping up the political situation in the country in the fourth quarter of the year. The budget was passed owing to the votes of the GERB parliamentary faction and the independent MPs, including those from the Order, Legality and Justice Party, the parliamentary faction of which disintegrated earlier this year.

The 2012 government budget envisages a real economic growth of 2.9 percent and a 1.3 percent deficit of the consolidated fiscal program. The expected rate of the average annual inflation is 3.2 percent. The direct foreign investments are expected to reach 2.8 percent of the country's GDP. The revenues of the republican budget are planned to reach a little over BGN 17 billion, whereby tax revenues are expected to amount to about BGN 15 billion, and non-tax revenues – to BGN 1.6 billion. The minimum salary of the lowest ranking civil servants is planned to stand at BGN 335 from January 2012 on.

The maximum social security income of BGN 2,000 has been preserved. The minimum pension of BGN 136 has been increased by BGN 9 and will be BGN 145 in 2012. The ceiling of BGN 700 on maximum pensions has also been preserved. The deficit of the National Social Security Institute is estimated to reach an amount of approximately BGN 2 billion, which will have to be covered by the government budget.

In 2012 the government is planning to spend BGN 5.5 billion from the various European funds. Such a task will be hard to accomplish, however, because it is merely EUR 2.3 billion that have been appropriated over the past four years.

The Blue Coalition voiced its critical remarks concerning the macro-economic framework of the 2012 government budget and the figures laid down in the budgets of the National Social Security Institute and the National Health Insurance Fund. The DSB leader,

Ivan Kostov, declared that his party had lost confidence in the Minister of Finance because of his plan to increase the government debt by over BGN 4 billion. The UDF leader, Martin Dimitrov, said that the 2012 budget would additionally aggravate and deepen the economic crisis in the country and would thus bring about new company defaults and an increased unemployment rate.

The government suggested that the retirement age be increased by an extra year as early as in 2012, so that a genuine pension reform could start and the deficit of the National Social Security Institute could gradually be overcome. The suggestion, however, brought about loud protests on the part of the Trade Unions, the representatives of which left the Tri-partite National Council. In result of the trade-union pressure, the government decided in favor of a gradual increase of the retirement age. This decision, however, was transferred to the National Assembly and the GERB governing majority therein, which led to a new break-up in the relations between the governing majority and the Trade Unions.

In the final account, the amended texts of the Labor Code passed by the National Assembly provide that from the beginning of 2012 on the retirement age will be increasing by four months every year until it reaches 63 years for women (in comparison with the current 60 years), and 65 years for men (in comparison with the current 63 years).

The order for the retirement of people who meet the age requirement but have failed to amass the mandatory social security length of service has also been amended. Until now these people were eligible to start receiving pensions at the age of 65 on the condition that they had been paying social security contributions for at least 15 full years. From 2012 on, however, the retirement age for them will also begin to gradually rise by 4 months per year until it reaches 67 years of age for both men and women.

The requirements for the retirement of people who have worked under hazardous

and risky conditions have become more restrictive as well. The gradual age increase by four months each year will apply to them, too, until, by the end of 2014, it reaches 48 years for women and 53 years for men, the professions of whom fall under the first category of labor, and 53 years for women and 58 years for men, the professions of whom fall under the second category of labor. The military personnel and the personnel of the Ministry of Interior will be able to retire with a 21 year-long overall social security length of service, provided that two thirds of this length of service has been amassed in precisely these two public institutions.

The representatives of the Blue Coalition refused to give support to these legislative amendments and voiced their stance that what Parliament had passed was far from the notion of reforms. They tabled a pension system model according to which each retiree would receive a pension commensurate with the social security contributions he or she had been actually paying.

The BSP launched sharp criticism at these legislative amendments and declared its intention to address the Constitutional Court to this effect. The MRF expressed a similar stance.

For their part, the Trade Unions announced that the amendments were illegitimate because they were tabled without obtaining the preliminary approval of the Tri-partite Council and in the absence of their representatives. The two national Trade Unions – the “Podkrepa” Labor Confederation and the Confederation of the Independent Trade Unions in Bulgaria expressed their readiness to organize a nation-wide strike as a sign of protest.

President Georgi Parvanov imposed his veto on the amendments to the pension system. In his opinion, the amended Labor Code contains substantial and insuperable legislative flaws, which infringe basic and inalienable citizen rights, and has been passed in conditions of significant procedural violations.

Along with the protests on account of the increased retirement age, the country wit-

nessed the strike of railway workers, which lasted for more than 20 days. The strike was held in response to the decision of the Cabinet to launch job cuts in the Bulgarian National Railway Company, which is facing imminent bankruptcy.

The crop-growers also organized mass protests – this time on account of cuts in the amount of the subsidies, which the government had earlier promised them to disburse.

At the beginning of December, the Bulgarian government made its final decision for the country to withdraw from its participation in the Bourgas – Alexandroupolis Project, the goal of which is the construction of an oil pipe-line under the Black Sea. The motives for this decision are based on pure economic considerations. The Bulgarian proposal is for the tri-partite agreement with Greece and Russia to be terminated by mutual consent. Should such a mutual consent fail to materialize, the Bulgarian side will withdraw from the project unilaterally. No final decision has been made with respect to the other contentious energy project – the construction of the “Belene” Nuclear Power Plant.

At the European Council, which made important decisions concerning the rescue of the Euro, the Bulgarian government gave its support to the German-French proposals for tightening the fiscal discipline in the European Union. Prime Minister Borissov announced that his governing party would shortly start consultations with the rest of the political parties represented at the National Assembly in order to draft the amendments to the Bulgarian Constitution, which will focus on the implementation of the proposed fiscal board elements in this country.

2. Situation and Development of the Party System

The 2011 elections showed that the GERB Party has preserved its positions of the strongest party in the country. The BSP has preserved its positions of a second-ranking po-

litical force and for the time being remains without any viable alternative in the left-wing political environment. The election results of the Attack Party and the OLI were poor. With such results they could hardly overcome the 4 percent electoral threshold at a possible new general election. The Blue Coalition also faces the problem concerning its political survival. The presidential election outcome for Meglena Kouneva indicates that in the country there is a potential for the establishment of a centrist party under her leadership.

2.1 Trends within the Right-Wing Political Environment

The right-wing parties at the National Assembly are going through a process of political re-orientation. The OLI Party sustained a radical transformation after the elections and declared its intention to be of assistance to GERB on all key issues and policies connected with the effort to overcome the economic crisis. The Attack Party also reconsidered its support for the GERB Party and all signs currently indicate that from now on it will be in opposition to the government. The Attack, however, has relapsed in an increasingly growing isolation and the processes of ongoing splits within its parliamentary faction could well threaten its future existence. DSB and the UDF have preserved their opposition behavior and have not given up the criticism they address to the government. The relations between these two parties, however, remain tense and aggravated because of the division, which occurred in their coalition at the time of the presidential election campaign.

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

GERB's success at the presidential and local elections has consolidated the positions of the government and the governing majority. For the first time after the onset of the democratic changes in Bulgaria, a governing party has won elections in the middle of its term

of office. Despite the economic crisis, the increasing unemployment rate, and the overall impoverishment of the population, the expectations for a punitive vote against the governing party failed to materialize.

One of the reasons for the success GERB scored is the lack of a genuine alternative to the incumbent government, capable of mustering the support of the majority of Bulgarians. The traditional Right Wing remains feeble and fragmented, while, for the time being, the BSP cannot be recognized as a viable governing alternative. On the other hand, for more than two years after winning the general election, the governing party has enjoyed enviable media comfort. At the time of the 2011 election campaign, GERB had a dominant media presence, which created certain inequality among the candidates of the individual parties and initiative committees, which were running in the elections.

The fact that Rossen Plevneliev won the presidential election has actually given GERB substantial power resources in all the major political institutions. After his victory Plevneliev declared that he would be a dialog-prone President and would make the activity of the presidential institution open and transparent. Although he has no genuine powers with respect to the executive branch of power, he made the commitment to lend support to the reform efforts in the judiciary, the administration, and the development of the regions. The attraction of foreign investments remains a key priority for the country and the President elect promised to do some hard work in this direction as well.

The major question mark Plevneliev is faced with is whether he would prove capable of emancipating himself from Boiko Borissov and become sufficiently independent in staying the decisions he will be making. This was one of the most frequent questions he was asked both during the election campaign and after the elections.

The victory of the GERB Party at the local elections has also strengthened the concentration of power within the party, making it

possible for it to develop on the local level by enhancing its political patronage. As early as the time of the election campaign, it could be seen how local business in many places throughout the country was re-orienting towards GERB and even many of the so-called business parties, which were present in the municipal councils of many localities, merged with the governing party

The GERB Party won the local elections in four of the largest cities of the country – Sofia, Plovdiv, Varna, and Bourgas. Yordanka Fandakova won the election for Sofia City Mayor at the first leg of the elections, capturing 53.3 percent of the votes. The GERB Party will also have the majority at the Sofia City Municipal Council with its 53 councilors. As expected, the incumbent Mayor of Bourgas, Dimitar Nickolov, won a convincing victory at the first leg of the election with more than 70 percent of the votes and the municipal council here will also be dominated by the GERB majority. In Plovdiv, the GERB candidate, Ivan Tottev, won the election at the run-off against the incumbent Mayor, Slavcho Atanassov. In Varna, the incumbent Mayor, Kiril Yordanov, who ran the election with the support of the GERB Party, also won a yet another term of office at the run-off.

GERB scored election victories in another 10 regional centers, namely the towns of Blagoevgrad, Rousse, Veliko Turnovo, Yambol, Pleven, Gabrovo, Silistra, Dobrich, Smolyan, and Stara Zagora. At the same time, the GERB Party sustained losses in three regional centers where it had incumbent mayors, namely: Vidin, Vratza, and Sliven.

The leadership of the GERB Party qualified the election victory as a confidence vote for the government. Boiko Borissov declared that the 2011 elections were a huge success for the party, because not a single governing party thus far had won such confidence in the middle of its term of office. According to the Prime Minister, the concentration of such power within his party also burdens it with enormous responsibility, which means

that GERB must make even bigger efforts to reform and modernize the country.

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

The UDF and DSB ran the 2011 presidential and local elections disunited and this fact had a negative bearing upon the overall performance of the Blue Coalition. The UDF presidential candidate, Roumen Christov, managed to muster as little as 1.95 percent of the popular vote.

The lacking unification between the UDF and DSB at the presidential election had an adverse impact on the election campaign of the Blue Coalition nominee for Sofia City Mayor, Proshko Proshkov from DSB, who mustered 11.5 percent of the Sofioter vote. The Blue Coalition party slate for Sofia city municipal councilors attracted 10.8 percent of the votes, which equals 8 municipal councilor mandates at the Sofia City Municipal Council.

One of the emblematic UDF figures – Naiden Zelenogorsky – lost the contest for the mayoral seat in the town of Pleven at the run-off. The difference between him and the winner, Dimitar Stoikov from the GERB Party, was merely 289 votes. Pleven was one of the constituencies from which the signals and evidence for electoral infringements were extremely numerous, including evidence for direct replacement of ballots in one of the polling stations. Zelelnogorsky did not acknowledge the election outcome and filed in a lawsuit for the annulment of the election result.

The UDF won the mayoral election in the town of Kyustendil in a coalition with other right-wing parties. Thus the incumbent Mayor, Peter Paunov, was re-elected as early as the first leg of the election. In the town of Montana, the Mayor elect is Zlatko Zhivkov. He was nominated to the post by a coalition called “Faith, Morals, Patriotism”, in which the UDF and DSB took part as well.

As soon as the 2011 elections were over, the criticism addressed at the UDF leader, Martin Dimitrov, escalated. A number of party organizations voiced demands for his resignation. Dimitrov refused to resign and demanded a confidence vote by the UDF National Council (NC). The members of the NC declared that the party statute contained no such procedural provision and it was pointless to take part in such a confidence vote. Martin Dimitrov admitted that the confidence vote actually had no binding legal force, but in this way he insisted on receiving the assessment of the party leadership concerning his overall performance in the capacity of party leader.

Dimitrov did receive the confidence vote of the UDF National Council, whereby 45 of its members voted in favor, 9 voted against, and another 3 abstained from the vote. About 20 of the NC members, however, refused to take part in the vote on the motive that the UDF statute envisaged no such a procedure. And yet another 27 NC members were not present at the scheduled NC meeting altogether.

These results showed that the party confidence, which Martin Dimitrov is currently enjoying, is quite brittle and that the opposition attitudes within the party are on the rise. Dimitrov's UDF opponents are the representatives of the Sofia city party organization. Its former chairman, Stephan Ivanov, demanded that Dimitrov immediately hand in his resignation in order to take upon himself the political responsibility for the UDF "disastrous performance" at the recent local and presidential elections, which was brought about by poor coalition and cadre decisions. Ivan Sotirov, also from the Sofia city party organization, declared that the party leader had lost the support of the party leadership, as he had received less than the half of all the votes to which the NC member are eligible.

Similar was the stance taken by the former party leader and ex-Foreign Minister in the government of the Alliance of Democratic Forces (1997-2001) – Nadezhda Neinsky –

who qualified the NC confidence vote as a victory achieved "ex officio".

At the end of November, DSB held its National Assembly, which elected the new party leadership and made an assessment of the recent presidential and local elections. Ivan Kostov was unanimously re-elected to the post of party leader. Three new DSB representatives were elected to the political leadership of the party, namely: Proshko Proshkov, Svetoslav Malinov, and Dimitar Syarov, who replaced MP Ivan Ivanov, Tzv. Tzvetkov, and Peter Nickolov respectively. The rest of the national leadership remains the same and includes: Ekaterina Mikhailova, Daniel Mittov, Dimitar Bachvarov, Kalin Yanakiev, Peter Moskov, Daniela Zhelyazkova, Radan Kanev, and Ivan Kostov. The party leader nominated Svetoslav Malinov and Radan Kanev for his deputy chairmen. Thus far, the number of the deputy chairpersons had been four altogether.

Ivan Kostov said that the elections had taken place in an atmosphere of fear and tension, the major reason being the strong administrative and political pressure exerted by the governing majority. In the opinion of Ivan Kostov, the poor result at the presidential election was due to the substitution of the Blue Coalition following the unsubstantiated coalition activities undertaken by the UDF. Nevertheless, Ivan Kostov defended the thesis that his party would do its best to preserve the Blue Coalition in the future as well.

At the National Assembly meeting Ivan Kostov also said that his party had withdrawn its confidence from the GERB Party because of the fact that the governing majority was pursuing an aggressive policy and was destroying the statehood of the country. Apart from that, the GERB Party had gone back on its pre-election promises to fight organized crime and corruption and to carry out the respective economic reforms. Moreover, in Kostov's opinion, the policy of the GERB Party was deepening the crisis in the country.

During the debates, the delegates to the National Assembly united around the opinion

that the results from the presidential and local elections were far more modest than the outcome they had expected. They declared their stance against forming a coalition with the parties of Stephan Sofiansky and Evgeni Backardjiev and for the preservation of the Blue Coalition. Proshko Proshkov accused the UDF for the loss at the vote for Sofia city mayor, because the UDF had “severed the national from the local elections campaign”.

2.1.3 The Attack Party

The performance of Volen Siderov and the Attack Party at the 2011 presidential and local elections confirmed the trend established over the past two years of a declining confidence in this party and its leader. Volen Siderov received 3.64 percent of the popular vote, which is far below the result he got at the previous presidential election when he made it to the run-off. This result indicates that the Attack Party will find it hard to overcome the 4 percent electoral threshold at the next general election.

The reasons for the poor results are complex ones. On one hand, the strong bond, which the Attack established with the GERB Party, brought about the gradual obliteration of the nationalists. On the other hand, the processes of ongoing splits within the party, which went through several stages over the last few years, additionally narrowed its electoral potential. Moreover, the new party of the name “National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria” (NFSB) established by the CEO of the SKAT Television, Valeri Simeonov, also brought about a further split of the nationalist vote. Thus for instance, the NFSB presidential candidate, Stephan Solakov, obtained 1.31 percent of the popular vote. Valeri Simeonov, who was running for the post of Bourgas city mayor, ranked second after the winner, while the Attack Party candidate, Dimcho Groudev, managed to muster as little as 1.26 percent of the votes. The NFSB also had better results than the Attack in the town of Yambol. What has been observed in towns such as Stara Za-

gora and Shoumen, where thus far the Attack had been scoring good results, is an overall decline in the support for Siderov’ party.

The 2011 elections have shown that the potential of the nationalist vote has been preserved at a level of about 5 percent, but the factor consolidating this vote is no longer Volen Siderov.

Volen Siderov did not accept the election outcome. He declared that the result announced for his electoral performance was not the result he actually got, because the elections were rigged. Siderov even insisted on a second counting of ballots, which – in his opinion – would prove the falsifications committed in the course of the elections. In the final account, the Attack Party gave its support to the subscription tabled by the BSP and the MRF before the Constitutional Court for the annulment of the election results.

Quite unexpectedly, a week after the run-off of the presidential election, Dimitar Stoyanov, Member of the European Parliament and Deputy Chairman of the Attack Party, demanded that Volen Siderov should hand in his resignation. Dimitar Stoyanov who is the step-son of Volen Siderov declared that the party leader had to resign on account of the poor election outcome. Dimitar Stoyanov also disagreed with the Attack Party’s participation in the subscription to the Constitutional Court, which was jointly filed in by the BSP and the MRF.

It actually turned out that Dimitar Stoyanov’s motives were substantiated by personal reasons, connected with the relationship between his mother Kapka Siderova and Volen Siderov. Siderov himself admitted that for some time now he did not live with his wife but added that this was an issue concerning the two of them only and had nothing to do with the political development of the party.

Volen Siderov qualified the attacks against him as part and parcel of the scenario for the disintegration of the party, which was drafted and directed by the GERB Party and Prime Minister Boiko Borissov himself.

The row raging within the Attack Party ended up with the exclusion of Dimitar Stoyanov from the party and the release of Kapka Siderova from the post of editor-in-chief of the "Attack" party daily. The party leadership appealed to Kapka Siderova to withdraw from the Sofia City Municipal Council as well, where she was elected municipal councilor at the October 2011 local elections.

The rows within the Attack Party accelerated the centrifugal processes taking place therein. The MP Tzveta Georgieva left the Attack parliamentary faction. The motive for her withdrawal was the support, which the Attack Party lent to the subscription of the BSP and the MRF before the Constitutional Court with the demand to declare the presidential vote illegitimate. At the same time, Georgieva gave her support to next year's government budget tabled by the Council of Ministers and shortly afterwards declared her future support for the GERB Party.

Another MP, Kalina Kroumova, also left the Attack parliamentary faction. She announced that she was dissatisfied with the lack of support on the part of her party fellows for the draft bills she was tabling in Parliament. In this way the Attack parliamentary faction remained with 14 people's deputies, whereas at the beginning of its parliamentary term of office it was made up by 21 MPs.

At the very end of the December parliamentary session, a yet another group of four MPs left the Attack parliamentary faction and became independent MPs. Thus, at the time being, the Attack parliamentary faction remains with the bare or "sanitary" minimum of 10 MPs, as the requirement for a parliamentary faction to exist is a total of 10 MPs.

2.1.4 The Order, Legality and Justice Party (OLJ)

The OLJ put its stakes on a negative election campaign, which was accompanied by incessant public attacks against the governing majority and its candidates. The major slogan in the campaign of the presidential candidate

Atanas Semov was: "I will sack Boiko Borissov". For his part, Yane Yanev was threatening to disclose information concerning Rossen Plevneliev and some of his alleged illegitimate business connections, but this threat never actually materialized.

Despite this extremely negative campaign directed at the GERB Party and Prime Minister Boiko Borissov, immediately after the first leg of the presidential election the OLJ took just the opposite stance. As soon as Atanas Semov received a mere 1.84 percent of the popular vote, Yane Yanev announced that at the presidential run-off his party would give support to Rossen Plevneliev, adding that his intention for the future of the party was to become a constructive opposition, which would support the work of the Cabinet on important political issues.

This move was a yet another proof to the fact that the OLJ is an opportunistic party, driven by the topical political set-up. The major reason, which the OLJ pointed out as a motive for such a change, was the deepening of the economic crisis and the need for joint efforts on the part of the political parties in order to overcome its further adverse effects.

Despite its poor election results, the OLJ made a positive assessment of its performance at the local elections. Yane Yanev said that the party now had 122 municipal councilors, thus consolidating its positions on the local level. In his opinion, the party had doubled its result in comparison with the 2007 local elections when the OLJ won only 55 municipal councilor mandates. Yane Yanev stated that the party had made a mistake by not nominating its candidate for Sofia city mayor and this mistake cost the party roughly 25,000 votes. Apart from that, Yanev also reported some organizational problems in the towns of Plovdiv, Varna, Razgrad, and Kurdjali. On account of the poor elections results, many of the local party leaders are expected to be shortly replaced.

After the 2011 elections, Atanas Semov in the capacity of Deputy Chairman of the party handed in his resignation on account of the

poor election outcome. The OLI Governing Board, however, refused to accept the resignation on the motive that Semov had performed with dignity during his worthy election campaign.

2.2 Trends within the Parliamentary Opposition

The 2011 elections showed that the BSP and the MRF will act together as an opposition to the government much more frequently from now on. The MRF support for Ivailo Kalfin at the run-off of the presidential election and the partnership between the two parties in various regions of the country at the time of the mayoral elections have consolidated the trend for such a cooperation. On the other hand, at this point in time the MRF is a party, which can hardly be eligible as a potential partner for the rest of the right-wing parties and the GERB Party itself. This is the reason why the closer cooperation with the BSP currently remains the only possible option holding some prospects for the MRF.

2.2.1 Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP)

After the first leg of the presidential election, the BSP appealed to all the citizens, who would hate to see all the power in the country concentrated in the hands of Boiko Borissov, to give their support to Ivailo Kalfin at the presidential election run-off, regardless of their party inclinations. Out of all the political parties, it was only the MRF that gave its official support to Ivailo Kalfin. Although this support contributed to shortening the gap between the two presidential candidates, Kalfin lost the election.

The BSP qualified the election outcome as a good one for the party. According to the party leader, Sergei Stanishev, the BSP won about 200 thousand votes more at the first leg of the presidential election in comparison with the 2009 general election. In his opinion, the BSP is currently the only serious alternative to the incumbent government.

The socialists also qualified the elections as dishonest and held under the sign of falsifications and the strong administrative and political pressure exerted by the governing party. According to Sergei Stanishev, these elections are an indication that basic democratic principles have been trampled down in this country, such as the right to vote for instance, from which thousands of citizens were deprived, having been included in prohibitive lists because of the principle of durable residency recently introduced with the amendments to the Electoral Code. What Stanishev had in mind were the complaints of numerous citizens who have permanently lived in this country for years, but have been deprived of the right to vote precisely because of their inclusion in the said prohibitive lists.

The BSP won the mayoral elections predominantly in medium-size and smaller municipalities in terms of population. As far as the regional centers are concerned, the party won the elections in the towns of Pernik, Lovech, Sliven, and Shoumen. In Sofia, the BSP candidate for the mayor's seat, Georgi Kadiev, failed to make it to a run-off. In Plovdiv, Bourgas, and Varna, the BSP candidates for mayors remained third.

The BSP lost the elections in regions where the party thus far had had emblematic mayors who are at the same time popular party figures. Thus for instance, Dora Yankova, who had governed the town of Smolyan for two consecutive terms of office, lost the elections at the run-off with the GERB candidate, Nickolai Melemov.

Having lost the election for Sofia city mayor, Georgi Kadiev became subject to strong criticism on the part of some of his party fellows. The Sofia city organization of the BSP accused Kadiev of the loss of the mayoral election, because the general expectation was for him to make to a run-off. Although he refused to take this criticism as sufficiently justified, Kadiev handed in his resignation from the Executive Bureau of the Sofia city party council, but retained his seat on the national party leadership.

The subject matter about the future role of President Georgi Parvanov after the end of his term of office at the end of January 2012 is becoming increasingly more topical. The incumbent President has once again declared his intention to come back to the party by saying that he will be present at the next party Congress. Many qualified this statement as Parvanov's ambition to return to the leadership post. He, however, failed to give an unequivocal answer to the question whether he will run for the leadership post.

Sergei Stanishev did not leave the subject matter about the future of Georgi Parvanov without a comment. Stanishev declared that he would run for the chairmanship at the next party Congress even if Georgi Parvanov ran for the post as well. Stanishev said that he had accomplished a lot in the capacity of BSP leader over the past few years and he was willing to continue his work in the future, so that the party could assert itself as a leading political force in the country.

The election of Sergei Stanishev to the post of President of the Party of European Socialists (PES) consolidated his positions within the BSP as well and in practice has rendered meaningless the intrigue concerning the leadership post in the party. Stanishev said that his election to this prestigious post is a high recognition for Bulgaria and an expression of trust in the BSP. In Stanishev's opinion, this post is making it possible for him to defend more effectively Bulgaria's interests in the European Union institutions.

In the capacity of President of the Party of European Socialists Stanishev made the commitment to work for the formulation of an economic and social alternative to the policy pursued by the right-wing governments within the European Union. According to the BSP leader, this right-wing policy pursued on the national and all-European levels has not only failed to solve the problems of the current crisis, but has also further deepened them. Another major task facing Stanishev is the closer involvement of the PES with the defense of

the major democratic values. In his opinion, the current crisis is not only of an economic and social nature, but is also a crisis of the democratic values, which Europe is supposed to uphold. The situation in this respect is especially worrisome in countries such as Hungary and Bulgaria, where basic democratic principles are being infringed.

2.2.2 Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF)

The MRF substantiated its support for Ivailo Kalfin at the presidential run-off with the threat of the alternative for GERB to concentrate an excessive amount of power, which would negatively impact the democracy in this country. Apart from this, in the opinion of the MRF, Kalfin was a politician of a long-standing career, had the necessary training for the post, and was a well-known figure on the international arena. Unlike him, Plevneliev was lacking the needed attributes and was likely to remain under the overall influence of Prime Minister Boiko Borissov.

The support lent to Ivailo Kalfin by the MRF resulted in a significant decrease of the difference between the two presidential contenders, but proved insufficient to bring about a genuine turnaround.

The MRF focused its attention mainly on the local elections, which have always been of a prime significance for the party. One of the question marks at these elections was whether the exclusion of Kassim Dahl from the party would result in an outflow of votes to the United People's Party (UPP) headed by Maria Kapon, which Dahl joined some time ago. Another challenge for the MRF was GERB's claim to make a breakthrough in regions, in which the MRF so far has always been a categorical winner. The outcome of the local elections showed that the MRF had managed to consolidate its ranks and had thus withstood all of these challenges.

In the first leg of the local elections, the MRF received approximately 7 percent of the votes. The data of the pollster agencies in-

licated that about 8 percent of the ethnic Turks had cast their ballots for Maria Kapon as a presidential candidate. Candidates for mayors and municipal councilors nominated by Kapon's United People's Party made a certain breakthrough in municipalities traditionally governed by the MRF. As a result, the UPP now has municipal councilors of its own in these municipalities. Such for instance are the municipalities of Doulovo and Glavinitzia in the district of Silistra, Samouil and Tzar Kaloyan in the district of Razgrad, as well as some of the municipalities in the district of Kurdjali, where between 5 and 10 percent of the ballots were cast for the UPP. In the municipality of Tzar Kaloyan, the UPP candidate for mayor, Ismail Kassabov even made to the run-off, but was defeated by the MRF candidate, Ahmed Ahmedov.

In the municipality of Kirkovov (Kurdjali district), the incumbent mayor, Shoukran Idriz, was nominated as candidate for mayor for a third consecutive term of office, but this time on the party slate of the UPP. This happened after Idriz took the side of Kassim Dahl as soon as he was eliminated from the MRF. Surprisingly, Idriz received a little over 900 votes, while the candidate of the MRF who was nominated for a first term office won the contest at the first leg of the elections. The attempt of the GERB Party to make a breakthrough here failed to materialize as their candidate – Essat Sadak – remained second. The MRF now has the majority in the municipal council of this municipality as well, which is very important for the party.

It is only in the municipality of Dospat that GERB managed to make the desired breakthrough with the re-election of the incumbent mayor Antim Purzhanov, elected in 2007 on the MRF party slate, who this time was nominated to the same post by the GERB Party. At the 2011 election Purzhanov managed to win over the MRF candidate, Plamen Aivazov, with a difference of nearly 10 percent. Currently, at the Municipal Council of the town of Dospat the GERB Party and the MRF have an equal

number of municipal councilor representing them, namely four municipal councilors each.

In the district of Razgrad, the MRF won in the majority of municipalities at the first leg of the local elections to the exception of the town of Razgrad, where the party has traditionally been weaker, and the MRF candidate for mayor, Hassan Ademov, remained third. At the run-off, the MRF gave its backing to the independent candidate for mayor, Dencho Boyadjiev, who was running the election with the support of the BSP. The MRF backing proved crucial for Boyadjiev's victory over the GERB Party candidate, Valentin Vassilev. Together, the BSP and the MRF now have the majority at the Razgrad municipal council, irrespective of the fact that the GERB Party enjoys the largest number of municipal councilors there.

The MRF scored victories in a number of municipalities in the district of Blagoevgrad, such as Gurmen, Yakoruda, Belitza, and Satovcha.

The MRF leadership qualified the results of the 2011 local elections as the second-ranking outcome in terms of success, which the party had enjoyed thus far. Elected on its party slates are 34 mayors of municipalities, 753 municipal councilors, and 615 mayors of mayorships. Nation-wide, more than 320,000 voters have cast their ballots for the MRF candidates, and this outcome is commensurate with the results, which the party traditionally obtains at the time of elections. This result, however, is far below the record breaking 610,000 votes, which the MRF received at the 2009 general election, but this result was rather due to the patronage vote the party had accumulated owing to its participation in the country's governance. It is quite normal for the MRF to shrink within its traditional electoral boundaries after the 2009 general election, as these boundaries are typical for its regionally detached ethnic electorate.

The MRF party leader, Ahmed Dogan, declared that the major political priority for the party continues to be "the upholding of the civil rights and freedoms, which were violently

trampled down by the governing party in the 2011 election process in a way inadmissible for a democratic country”.

3. Public Opinion

The results from the 2011 presidential and local elections outlined several interesting trends. The elections showed that the voters of the GERB Party are predominantly people from the larger towns in the country, people of a higher educational level, people within the younger age bracket, and people with relatively higher incomes. To a large extent the above profile corresponds to the right-wing voter in the country.

The BSP voters continue to be elderly and retired people, people of a lower educational level, and people inhabiting the smaller towns and villages in the country. This voter profile has invariably accompanied the BSP ever since the democratic changes took place back in 1990.

The MRF continues to be a regionally separated political party and its voters are predominantly ethnic Turks and Bulgarians professing the Moslem religion.

The exit-polls of the pollster agencies indicated that the voters who cast their ballots for Meglena Kuneva are predominantly young people of a centrist orientation, people of a higher educational level, representatives of the free-lance professions and the intelligentsia. A sizeable part of the right-wing voters who normally support DSB and the UDF have also cast their ballots for Meglena Kuneva. This is mainly due to the insufficient popularity of the Right Wing candidate, Roumen Christov.

At the presidential run-off, two thirds of the voters who had cast their ballots for Kuneva at the first leg of the election voted again, whereby Kalfin and Plevneliev received an almost equal number of these votes each.

4. Major Conclusions and Forecasts

1. The 2011 presidential and local elections revealed the existence of serious organizational weaknesses in the electoral process. The foul practices of vote purchasing and controlled vote were accompanying this election campaign as well. The need for establishing a professional and permanent election commission is becoming increasingly more apparent, whereby it should be composed of experts who are free from any party bondage whatsoever.

2. The victory GERB scored at the presidential and local elections can be qualified as a confidence vote for the government. One of the reasons for the success of the GERB Party is the weakness of the other political alternatives. The traditional Right Wing remains feeble and fragmented, while the BSP is still incapable of moving beyond its rock-bottom party electorate, which could make it possible for it to attract new voters for its cause. On the other hand, during the election campaign the GERB Party dominated the mass media environment, which created certain inequality among the running candidates.

For the time being, the President elect, Rossen Plevneliev, is making promises of being a proactive and dialog-prone President. But it is only the future that will show whether he could prove capable of emancipating himself from his political patron, Boiko Borissov. The election victory has increased the political responsibility of the GERB Party and the latter will find it much more difficult to continue to justify itself with explanations about the bad inheritance it has received from the previous government. The country needs urgent reforms in the public sector, but thus far the GERB Party has manifested only inconsistency in its chaotic efforts to pull them off. The governing party is getting increasingly insulated and what can be observed is the lack of willingness to hold a dialog both with the rest of the political parties in the country and with the Trade Unions and the Employers' Associations.

3. The election outcome for the parties of the Blue Coalition indicated that the traditional Right Wing continues to be feeble and fragmented. The UDF and DSB exacerbated their relations on account of the presidential election, which had an adverse impact on both the parties. The future relationships between the UDF and DSB remain obscure. To run the next election individually will make it difficult for them to overcome the 4 percent electoral threshold. This is the reason why the two parties will make an effort to smooth out their differences, which are not so much of a political and ideological nature, but rather represent a tactical clash of leaders' groups vying for influence and better positioning.

The confidence Martin Dimitrov has been enjoying in the capacity of UDF leader has begun to increasingly deplete and it is highly likely for a change at the helm of the UDF to take place within a short period of time.

4. The poor performance of Volen Siderov and the Attack Party at the 2011 presidential and local elections confirmed the continuing trend of a declining confidence in this party and its leader. The unreserved support for the GERB Party, which the Attack was manifesting until recently, brought about the gradual obliteration of the Attack Party, whereas its subsequent radicalization repudiated its voters even more.

The result of Stephan Solakov at the presidential election and the results of the newly established party called "National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria" (NFSB), which supported Solakov, showed that the potential of the nationalist vote remains approximately at its 2009 levels, indicating at the same time that the Attack Party is no longer the political force capable of consolidating it.

„The family row“ within the Attack Party will impact its future prospects even more adversely. Volen Siderov has relapsed into an increasingly deeper isolation and the ongoing process of splits with the Attack party parliamentary faction can threaten its very existence. A testimony to the gravity of this threat is the

fact that the Attack parliamentary faction has now reached the bare minimum of 10 MPs.

5. The OLI and Yane Yanev performed their latest "political piourette" by making a radical shift from an extreme opposition to the country's governance to a party declaring its support for the government immediately after the first leg of the October elections. For a yet another time this move consolidated the opinion that this party is driven by circumstantial factors and represents a typical populist and opportunistic formation. The OLI election results were poor as expected and the party would hardly be able to regain the popular support it enjoyed back in 2009.

6. The BSP continues to be the second-ranking political force in the country. In comparison with the 2009 general election, its 2011 election outcome indicates some rise, however slight it is, in its overall electoral support. And yet, the BSP continues to be a party backed up mainly by the older generation and is experiencing difficulties in attracting supporters belonging to the younger electorate. Despite the economic crisis in the country, the growing unemployment rate, and the declining purchasing power of an increasingly larger number of citizens, the party failed to discover both the effective formula and the political tactic capable of making the majority of the electorate recognize in it the genuine political alternative to the GERB Party.

The BSP-supported presidential ticket made a better performance at the presidential election than the performance of the BSP itself at the local elections. To a large extent this is due to the personal traits and charisma of each of the running mates and especially to the radiant charisma of the popular favorite, Stephen Danailov.

Despite the return of Georgi Parvanov to the BSP, the leadership post of Sergei Stanishev looks solid especially after he was elected President of the Party of European Socialists. Parvanov's come back, however, is sure to impact the debates within the party and will bring about a new re-grouping of the major forces therein.

7. The MRF had predominantly focused its attention on the local elections, which have always been extremely important for this party with a view to its specific regionally-bound nature. One of the challenges the MRF had to face at these elections was connected with the question whether there would be a significant outflow of votes prompted by the opposition behavior of the former MRF activist Kassim Dahl. The election outcome showed that Dahl's impact proved insufficient to result in any visible and substantial shift within the electoral layers, which thus far the MRF has traditionally dominated. Nation-wide, the MRF managed to capture the vote of more

than 320,000 supporters, and this outcome is commensurate with the results, which the party traditionally obtains at the time of elections. This result, however, is far below the record breaking 610,000 votes, which the MRF received at the 2009 general election.

8. The presidential election outcome of Meglena Kuneva indicates that there is a potential for the establishment of a new centrist formation in the country, but its materialization will very much depend on the willingness of the former European Commissioner to set up such a new political party of her own. For the time being, however, her intentions to this effect remain undisclosed.

About the editors:

Georgi Karasimeonov, Professor, Doctor of Philosophical Sciences, is Director of the Institute for Political and Legal Studies and Editor-in-Chief of the *Political Studies* academic periodical. From 1991 to 1998 he was Chairman of the Bulgarian Political Science Association. Address for contacts: ipls@dir.bg

Milen Lyubenov, Political Science PhD, is assistant professor at the Chair of Political Science with the St. Kliment Ochridsky Sofia University. Address for contacts: mlubenov@abv.bg



Imprint

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

Orders

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

Translation

Antonia Parcheva

All texts are available online

www.fes.bg

The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung or of the organization for which the author works.