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Political Parties Development in Bulgaria

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- The upcoming elections have increasingly exacerbated the political situation in the country. Inflation and growing unemployment have escalated social tensions. A growing number of industry associations and syndicates have requested wage increases. This may result in a wave of protests in the winter which would be used by the opposition parties.
- Until the elections the GERB ruling party will focus mostly on campaigning and highlighting government achievements. The trend of plummeting confidence in the party is continuing and this will be the main challenge for the governing party on the eve of the elections. Nonetheless, it remains the frontrunner in terms of electoral influence.
- Stanishev's election as PES leader strengthened the BSP's legitimacy abroad, which may turn out to be an important factor in the election campaign next year. It will rally the party around its leader even more. The list of signatures in favor of a referendum on the Belene Nuclear Power Plant showed the BSP's mobilizing potential.
- Bulgaria of the Citizens Movement of Meglena Kuneva will increasingly draw public attention. Opinion polls indicate that the party will almost certainly enter the next Parliament. Kuneva stated clearly that she will run independently in the elections and so far has been avoiding the issue of potential coalitions in the new Parliament.

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1. The political, social and economic situation

The political situation in the country over the last quarter is marked by increasing clashes among political forces. One of the main reasons was the terrorist attack at Sarafovo Airport in Burgas, when a suicide bomber blew himself up beside a bus transporting Israeli tourists. Hours after the attack the Israeli government accused Hezbollah of the terrorist attack and sent its representatives to assist the Bulgarian authorities in the investigation.

Almost two months after the terrorist act, it remains unclear who was behind the attack. Nor has the identity of the suicide-bomber been established, or how he entered the country. Interior Minister Tsvetan Tsvetanov assured that the Bulgarian authorities were doing their best to identify the terrorist and to clarify everything related to the preparation and the implementation of the attack. In his view, the attack was prepared outside the country.

At a meeting between the governments of Bulgaria and Israel in Jerusalem in September, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu also declared that the terrorist attack in Sarafovo was carried out by Hezbollah. Prime Minister Borissov, however, stated that the investigation had not so far produced conclusive proof as to who was behind the attack.

The terrorist attack at Sarafovo Airport raised some very serious questions before the Bulgarian state. The condition and the quality of the security system became a leading topic.

The opposition accused the government of having underestimated the danger of a terrorist attack in Bulgaria. 'Ataka' leader Volen Siderov was most extreme in his judgment and he again expounded on the presence of Islamic fundamentalism in Bulgaria. Siderov declared that the National Security State Agency (NSSA) disregarded information from the Israeli secret service about the potential possibility of attack against Israeli

tourists in Bulgaria earlier on during the winter tourist season. Siderov recalled that, at the time, when asked about any preventive measures Bulgaria had taken against a possible terrorist attack, Prime Minister Borissov responded that the country did not face such a threat since "there is doner kebab at every corner in Bulgaria".

The opposition criticized the government that in the NSSA annual report for last year terrorism was not even mentioned as a national security threat.

Premier Borissov responded to the accusations that no-one was insured against a terrorist act and that it was very hard to prevent such an act, quoting as an example similar acts from around the world.

Another important event that impacted the political situation in the country was the EC Report on the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism. The report was preceded by a scandal that shook the judiciary in the country. One week before the report was published, the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) sacked the head of the Judges' Union of Bulgaria Miroslava Todorova for delayed publication of the motives for two sentences that led to the expiration of the statute of limitations of the cases. Judge Todorova has made quite a stir lately as one of the strongest champions of the independence of the judiciary in Bulgaria, and especially for having clashed vehemently with Interior Minister Tsvetan Tsvetanov who has been verbally attacking the Bulgarian magistrates ever since GERB took office. Todorova also brought a libel suit against Minister Tsvetanov.

Judge Todorova's dismissal provoked an unprecedented protest of judges in Bulgaria in front of the SJC headquarters. This aggravated the political situation in the country before the publication of the monitoring report and revealed again a series of faults in the work of the SJC as well as the lack of clear and transparent motives for its rulings.

A number of politicians and analysts assessed the report of the European Commission to be one of the most negative ones over the last five years. It indicated that the monitoring of Bulgaria continued and the next report would come out at the end of 2013. The report is critical of the lack of adequate reforms in the justice and home affairs system, and expresses concern with the growing influence of organized crime in the political and social life of the country, remaining a "fundamental challenge for the state and society". The criticism is the result of the poor closing rate of cases of hired killings as well as of the legal constraints regarding the activity of the Specialized Criminal Court and the Specialized Prosecutor's Office. Yet another problem outlined is the lack of results of the witness protection program and the struggle with corruption in the upper echelons of power and the administration.

For the first time in the last five years the report spells out concerns regarding the development of democracy and the division of powers in Bulgaria; it emphasizes that government representatives exert pressure on the judiciary with their criticism. In this context, the report mentions the case of Judge Todorova.

Following the publication of the report, the opposition launched severe criticism against the government. The BSP leader Stanishiev described it as "murderous". In his view, the European Commission's continued monitoring of the country is "a red card to Boiko Borissov's governance."

Lutfi Mestan from MRF stated that this report made the country's entry in Schengen impossible in the foreseeable future, which was a failure for the GERB government.

The European Commission report was the reason for BSP and MRF to submit a fifth vote of no-confidence against the government, motivated by its failure in the area of justice

and home affairs, which was denied by the ruling majority, as expected.

In September, the new Supreme Judicial Council was elected in Bulgaria. It is burdened with a lot of expectations to reform adequately the judiciary and to regain public confidence. The SJC has 25 members with a 5-year tenure. The Prosecutor General, the Chairman of the Supreme Court of Cassation (SCC) and the Chairman of the Supreme Administrative Court (SAC) are members by right. Eleven of the members are elected by the National Assembly, and the remaining 11 by the judiciary. For the first time, a public hearing of the candidates was held before the election. The government took into account the recommendations from Brussels and from a number of non-governmental organizations, and opted for an open and transparent procedure. However, a number of NGOs and observers remained doubtful of an orchestrated ballot with an anticipated result and an arrangement among the main parties about the distribution of the seats from the parliamentary quota. Doubts also lingered about advance trade-offs in appointing the candidates from the judicial quota. The first main task of the new Supreme Judicial Council will be to elect a new Prosecutor General by the end of the year.

The beginning of the new parliamentary session showed that the political parties in the country will engage in a harsh election campaign. This became clear from the traditional opening declarations of the parliamentary parties. In their political declaration, the ruling party GERB announced that the party was more united than ever and stood ready to bring to completion its programmatic commitments. The chairman of the parliamentary faction, Krasimir Velchev, underlined that GERB shall embark on a policy of income increase as of 2013. Besides income increase, GERB also prom-

ised a reduction of the prices of pharmaceutical products, the completion of the health, judiciary and education reforms, as well as the continuation of highway construction.

In their declaration, BSP once again declared themselves to be the alternative to the government. The leader of the party, Sergei Stanishev, accused the party in power of focusing their actions exclusively on election goals. He announced the referendum on the Belene Nuclear Power Plant and, guaranteeing fair elections as other immediate priorities, BSP also declared that they would come up with an alternative budget for 2013.

MRF delivered the most radical declaration of the new season. The party deputy chairman, Lutfi Mestan, insisted that the National Assembly be dissolved and early elections held. In his view, the majority had exhausted their political resource and GERB relied only on the accusations against the former government without suggesting a single genuine reform measure.

The co-chairman of the Blue Coalition, Martin Dimitrov, stated that the government has failed in the economic policy, which is evidenced by the increase of prices, unemployment, and the deterioration of all economic indicators. In his view, this led to measures that are typical of left-wing populism, such as the attempt to control the prices of some food products as announced by the cabinet in August. Dimitrov described the grim economic situation, placing a particular emphasis on unemployment. According to him, unemployment grew in the summer months for the first time since Zhan Videnov's government, which was notoriously remembered for the worst economic and financial crisis in the country in the late 90s. For one more time Martin Dimitrov accused the government of tolerating monopolies.

In their political declaration "Ataka" drew attention to a rise in Roma-related crime and the lack of adequate reaction by the govern-

ment. They also raised the unrealistic idea of raising the minimum salary to 1,000 BGN and the minimum pension to 500 BGN.

The economic situation in the country impacts political discourse and public mood ever more strongly. It will also influence the political situation in the country and will be a major campaign issue.

During this trimester employment is continuing to plummet and unemployment is growing. According to Eurostat data, unemployment in July was 12.4%. According to data provided by the National Statistics Institute, inflation in the country has also gone up. In August consumer prices went up by 0.5% compared to July, and inflation was 2.6% from the beginning of the year. There was a price rise in the entire range of food items and in transportation – 2.9%. As of August 1 the price of electricity went up by 13%, which led to a strong public outcry and syndicate demands for indexation of wages and pensions.

Given the economic situation, Finance Minister Simeon Dyankov promised a rise in pensions as of April 2013, as well as of budget salaries. The Minister of Labour and Social Policy, Totyo Mladenov, announced that the rise in pensions would be between 8% and 10%. The opposition, in turn, accused GERB of pledging money for election purposes without being in a position to secure it. In this context, the debates on the budget for 2013 will be extremely tense.

In this quarter, energy projects again became a major topic on the political agenda. The Russian company Atomstroyexport lodged a claim in the International Court of Arbitration for the amount of 1 billion euro on account of the discontinuation of the Belene Nuclear Power Plant. The Bulgarian government described the claim as unfounded and declared that Bulgaria has the arguments to win the case.

In the meantime, in August the US company Westinghouse won the tender announced by the government for a feasibility study regarding the possibility of using the Belene equipment in the construction of a new block in the Kozlodui Nuclear Power Plant.

At the end of August, Bulgaria signed with the Total consortium for the drilling and exploration for oil and gas on the continental shelf of the Black Sea in 'The Khan Asparuh Block 1-21'. The exploration contract is for five years, for the amount of 1 billion euro. The expectations are to find gas deposits of 40 to 80 billion cubic meters. According to experts, this amount should meet Bulgaria's demand for 20 to 30 years.

Upcoming elections brought about the emergence of new political subjects. Among these, Meglena Kuneva's party, the Bulgaria-of-the Citizens Movement, which is already registered as a political party, has the biggest chance of entering the next Parliament. The new party positioned itself to the right of center. Meglena Kuneva said that her party aims to govern the country independently and declared to be an opposition and alternative to the ruling party. She stated firmly that the party will run in the election on its own. The civic association of the same name continues to operate alongside the party.

2. Characteristics and development of the party system

2.1. *Tendencies in the right-wing party space*

2.1.1. GERB

GERB have practically started their preparation for the parliamentary elections next year since this trimester. A major challenge for the party is to handle the downsides of governance and the growing public discontent

among a number of social groups with the economic situation in the country.

Internally, the party seems to be ever more divided into various groups and lobbies. This became clear during the year with the adoption of lobbyist legislation recognized as such not only by the opposition but also by a number of non-governmental organizations. According to analysts, this process will intensify as the elections and the end of this government's term draw closer.

The party is losing electoral support in a number of regions throughout the country. The following regions are considered most problematic: Targovishte, Razgrad, Shumen, Kyustendil, and Vratsa. This led to the replacement of the district leader of GERB in Targovishte – Lily Boyanova. The deputy leader of the GERB parliamentary faction, Todor Dimitrov, also had to part with the same posting in Razgrad.

The main clash among different lobbies in the party will grow harsher in the process of drafting the MPs' tickets for the elections. The party announced that the future parliamentary faction of GERB for the next parliament would be drafted according to a new formula. It is expected that, besides leading MPs, ministers and regional governors, popular public figures would also be included aiming at a renewal of the party's image. As Premier Boiko Borissov said, the party would place its faith in new faces from its youth organization.

A major weakness of the current parliamentary faction is the lack of activity of a large group of its MPs. GERB intend to carry out a large-scale survey by regions, which is expected to bring forward leading public figures of the party in the regional centers in the country.

In September, Interior Minister Tsvetan Tsvetanov and the GERB MP from the Kurdjali electoral district, Tsveta Karayancheva, met in the National Assembly with expats from Turkey, led by the chairman of the Bulturk expat

organization, Rafet Uluturk. It is very likely that, as a result of this meeting a GERB party office is opened in Turkey, which will be combined with a visit of Tsvetan Tsvetanov to discuss party matters. The Bulgarian expats who attended the meeting pledged serious support in the elections. Tsveta Karayancheva has visited Turkey twice this year and met with local political leaders and expat civic associations. GERB announced this as a positive development, which indicated that MRF was no longer the sole intermediary in the dialogue between Bulgaria and the Bulgarians of Turkish origin living in Turkey.

GERB announced that the main goal of the party was winning the elections with an absolute majority, which would guarantee the continuation of the reforms started by the government and the completion of the infrastructural projects.

2.1.2. The Blue Coalition (UDF and DSB)

In early July the first round for the election of a new leader of UDF was held. This special vote was necessitated by the resignation of the former party chairman Martin Dimitrov in mid-May. He resigned because the supreme party body refused to support the continuation of the Blue Coalition in the next elections.

Five candidates participated in the first round: the members of parliament, Vanyo Sharkov and Lachezar Toshev; the deputy chairman of the party, Rumen Hristov; Ivan Sotirov; and the mayor of the town of Karlovo, Emil Kabaivanov. One day before the first round, Rumen Hristov withdrew from the race. He endorsed Emil Kabaivanov. The ballot led to a run-off between Emil Kababaivanov and Vanyo Sharkov. They stood for two different visions about the future of UDF. Emil Kabaivanov had the support of those opposing the coalition with DSB. On the other hand, the MP Vanyo Sharkov was favoured by the defenders of the Blue Coalition.

According to the results of the ballot on June 15, 85% of the party members took part in the vote. Kabaivanov was elected to be the new UDF leader with a total of 3,941 votes against 3,652 votes for Sharkov.

Emil Kabaivanov is less known to the general public. He was trained as a doctor and an economist. He has been a UDF member since 1992. In 1999 – 2003 he chaired the Municipal Council in Karlovo; he was mayor of the town from 2003 until 2007. He started his second term as mayor in 2011. He led the 'National Coordination' department in the UDF headquarters in Sofia from 2007 till 2011.

The new UDF leader firmly supports the cessation of the relations between UDF and DSB. In his view, the Blue Coalition failed in enhancing confidence in the UDF. The new course is aimed at changing this state of affairs.

He denies the existence of two power centers or two UDFs. He is resolute that relations will be based on the adherence to the party statute and principles. He insists on observing the principle that the political decisions of the national UDF bodies are mandatory for all European and national MPs, municipal counselors and mayors. Regardless of these statements, the group around the former leader Martin Dimitrov and the MP Vanyo Sharkov expected to join DSB in the elections next year.

In this context, it is interesting to note the views expressed by prominent UDF politicians following Emil Kabaivanov's election. The MEP Nadezhda Neinski stated that with this election the UDF has resigned from large-scale national politics and has become a party of exclusively supportive functions.

After the collapse of the Blue Coalition, DSB began preparations to run independently in the elections next year. At the same time, it is also looking for partners in the current format of the Blue Coalition – agrarians and social-democrats.

This trimester also revealed DSB's growing criticism of the ruling party. It is aimed against the impact of monopolies, the price increase in food products and the lack of judicial reform. DSB accuses GERB of intentionally ruining small businesses "to favour monopolies that are close to the ruling establishment" as stated by the DSB deputy chairman Radan Kanev.

2.1.3. "Ataka"

The terrorist act in Burgas was the cause of "Ataka" taking up again the subject of the threat of Islamic fundamentalism in the country. Siderov accused the current and the former governments of a "vassal" policy vis-a-vis the West, the United States and Israel that led to the terrorist attack in Burgas. He launched direct accusations against the Foreign Minister, Nikolay Mladenov, for his initiative in support of the opposition in Syria. Siderov labeled it as a short-sighted action, jeopardizing the country's national security.

As a part of the preparations for next year's elections, "Ataka" proposed amendments to the Assemblies, Rallies and Demonstrations Act for a ban on the use of a foreign language during public rallies and demonstrations regardless of whether they are held before or during an election campaign. This comes as a counter-balance to the MRF proposal for amendments to the Election Code to allow for the election campaign to be carried out in a non-Bulgarian language. The National Assembly voted down the MRF proposal.

"Ataka" did not betray itself and went on with its social populism and during this trimester it continued to pursue the topics of price control and the struggle against monopolies. The party demanded Angel Semerdjiev's resignation as chairman of the State Energy and Water Regulating Commission because of the increase in electricity prices. "Ataka" also tabled a proposal for a moratorium on bread prices, which was declined by Parliament.

The party launched a number of other populist legislative proposals, such as for the yield of natural resources to be carried out by the Bulgarian state and for the profit to remain in Bulgaria, terminating all concessions of foreign companies that carry out such activity.

"Ataka" opposed the government contract concluded with Total for exploration and yield of oil and gas in the Black Sea. In Volen Siderov's view, in the future "a foreign company" might be selling Bulgaria Bulgarian oil and gas. Therefore, "Ataka" declared that they will introduce legislative amendments to settle these issues. Siderov pointed out that if the ruling party declined these amendments it would mean that the government was operating against Bulgarian national interest.

During this quarter, the tendency of rapprochement between "Ataka" and VMRO – BND, led by Krasimir Karakachanov, is about to become an institutional arrangement. Everything indicates that the parties will run together in the elections next year. Krasimir Karakachanov launched the idea of a patriotic and nationalistic block in an open letter to "Ataka", to Volen Siderov's former party fellow Valeri Simeonov and his party National Front for Bulgaria's Salvation, to former "Ataka" MP and leader of "Defense", Yordan Velichkov, and to other patriotic formations.

Although Volen Siderov and Valeri Simeonov have been in conflict over the past year, which led to a split in "Ataka", they seem to have overcome their discord, guided by political expediency and the desire to be elected again.

2.1.4. OLI

The past trimester outlined ever more clearly a new political project between OLI and the Varna businessman, Veselin Mareshki. The latter is a Bulgarian millionaire who owns a pharmacy chain throughout the country. Until three years ago he was municipal counselor in Varna and deputy chairman of the Municipality.

pal Council elected on the OLI ticket. In 2009, however, he was expelled from the OLI MEP ticket on suspicion of buying votes. In the elections for mayor of Varna last year Mareshki made it to the run-off.

Mareshki is a controversial individual, constantly under scrutiny for having held his campaigns with purchased votes and a controlled ballot based on his pharmacy chain.

According to a number of observers, the new line of interaction between OLI and Mareshki is the product of political engineering of circles related to the GERB ruling party. In all probability, OLI and Mareshki will be used for defaming PR against GERB's political opponents. It is no accident at all that both Yane Yanev and Mareshki started a tough campaign against Meglena Kuneva, who has emerged as one of the most vocal critics of the governing party.

The MPs from GERB and OLI jointly voted primary amendments to the Political Parties Act. They were introduced by Yane Yanev and deal with limiting the possibility of associations to develop into political parties, and of party names to be borrowed from already registered associations and non-governmental organizations.

OLI made one more proposal regarding the Election Code. Yane Yanev maintains that the parliamentary threshold for coalitions should be amended – while it could remain unchanged for a two-party coalition at 4%, it should be raised by 1% for every other party that may join in.

2.2. Tendencies in the parliamentary opposition: the left-of-center spectrum

2.2.1. BSP

During the past quarter BSP intensified its criticism to the ruling party. They criticized the failed implementation of undertaken commitments which brought the ruling party to pow-

er – the fight against corruption and organized crime, Bulgaria's membership in Schengen, improvement of living standards and raising incomes. According to BSP, bankruptcy, collapse in economic growth and unprecedented unemployment took place instead.

The topic of the Belene Nuclear Power Plant was brought up again by BSP submitting 770,000 signatures in Parliament, demanding a referendum on the fate of the plant.

According to the law, all signatures must be verified within three months and a referendum date set. The BSP leader Sergei Stanishev declared that he expected the National assembly to abide by the law and set the referendum date in due time. He maintains that any attempt of the ruling party to discomfit its holding would mean transgression of the Constitution of the country.

During the past trimester BSP undertook a few more initiatives. The member of the party leadership, Yanaki Stoilov, announced that the BSP will submit a proposal for the state to pay for the insurance of the unemployed registered in the Unemployment Bureau. He went on to specify that this idea would undergo public discussion before specific draft legislation would be submitted.

In mid-September BSP's National Council decided that the parliamentary faction of Coalition for Bulgaria would submit a request in the National Assembly to suspend the privatization procedures of the Bulgarian State Railways – Cargo Transport, 'Terem', VMZ – Sopot, Technoexportstroy, as well as of the minority shares in the energy provider companies.

The elections for chairman of PES in this quarter were particularly important for BSP. At the end of July BSP voted a decision to put forward the candidacy of Sergei Stanishev for the position.

He was an interim chairman from late 2011 until the PES congress in September 2012 which elected him as chairman. At the end of August

Sergei Stanishev was elected Vice President of the Socialist International at its 24th congress.

This election is recognition of Stanishev and his work as leader of the BSP over recent years, as well as for his international activity. It will enhance the international legitimacy of the party in the context of next year's elections.

Former president Georgi Parvanov, who withdrew from the race for the leadership position in BSP at the end of May, announced his intention to become actively engaged politically in the autumn. Parvanov stated clearly that he had no intentions to run for member of parliament but intended to use his authority for the success of the left. He will obviously try to play the role of informal leader and attempt to influence the political process and the BSP agenda with his public statements.

2.2.2. MRF

The local annual conferences of MRF have continued over the past three months. They serve for the preparation of the party for the parliamentary elections next year. The conferences in the regions of traditional MRF ascendancy – Kardjali, Silistra, Burgas, Targovishte, Shumen and Razgrad – are of particular interest.

Muzaffer Mustan, the outgoing chairman and sole candidate for the position, was re-elected as leader in Razgrad. In his report on the work of the local organization he emphasized that it established itself as a leading force in the municipality. He also declared his desire to facilitate the full-fledged activity of the local clubs.

In Kardjali the position was taken by Muharem Muharem, with 143 votes against 120 votes for his opponent Giundiuz Ismail.

In Burgas Sherafet Mehmed was elected almost unanimously to lead the local MRF organization. He replaced the outgoing leader, Selim Isa, and declared that he was going to continue his course of team work and securing employment for the voters. Selim Isa was nominated for the position of regional representative.

The local conferences will be followed by regional conferences in the autumn.

Next year's elections may prove to be especially hard for MRF, the reason being the desire of other parties to break through its traditional electorate. The attempts of GERB to mobilize the expatriate organizations in Turkey in its favor were mentioned earlier.

BSP also indicated that they were not giving up the local vote and the party created a new unit to operate in the areas with mixed population, led by Milko Bagdasarov.

It has become clear in the last three months that the former MRF MPs, Kasim Dal and Korman Ismailov, will start a new party in the autumn, which will be yet another challenge for MRF.

3. Public opinion

A Sova Harris national poll conducted between 17 and 23 September among 1,000 respondents indicated that, if the parliamentary elections were to be held this autumn, they would be won by GERB. It would receive 27.8% of the vote. BSP would come second with 19.2%. The ratio between the two main opponents is 3:2, or an electoral ceiling of 1.5 million votes for GERB and 1 million for BSP. The election of Sergei Stanishev as PES chairman is expected to enhance his support among the Bulgarian voters. Almost 27% of the respondents believe that this will increase BSP's electoral weight as well.

Meglana Kuneva's new party, Bulgaria of the Citizens Movement, comes third with 4.6%. A slight drop is noted in the support for MRF: 4.6%. The break-up of the Blue Coalition continues to impact negatively the results of the two parties in it. UDF still enjoys slightly higher electoral support: 2.4%, compared to DSB with 1.7%. The 'Ataka' party receives 2.4% of the respondents' votes.

The survey shows that all ministers have a negative rating. The Minister of Finance,

Simeon Dyankov, gets the highest disapproval: 67.2% are of the opinion that he does not handle his job well. Frontrunners in this rating are Totyo Mladenov with 62.5% negative scores, Desislava Atanasova with 54% and Tsvetan Tsvetanov with 52.1%.

The Minister of Regional Development and Public Works, Lilyana Pavlova, has the highest approval of 47.6%. For yet another successive time the minister of this sector leads in the rating. She is followed by Nikolay Mladenov with 39.4%, and Vezhdi Rashidov with 33.8%

Over the past six months the share of those who believe that the failures of the ruling party are more than the achievements has gone up by 6%. According to 18.4% the government is a complete failure.

The data of the survey indicates that for 45% of the people the construction of the Belene NPP is important to the country, while 30% think it does not matter. If a referendum is to be held on this question, 56% will take part in it. Two large groups are formed on this matter. The first group comprises the supporters of BSP, MRF, 'Ataka', VMRO - BND, and NFSB. In their view, the construction of the Belene NPP is a national priority, which would bring Bulgaria into the group of high-technology countries. The second group consists of supporters of GERB, UDF and DSB who put forward financial and ecological arguments. The supporters of the Bulgaria of the Citizens Movement hesitate between the two views.

In the view of 61.7% of the voters the social policy and specifically the problems of jobs, unemployment and living standards must be a priority for the next government.

4. General conclusions and forecasts

1. The upcoming elections have increasingly exacerbated the political situation in the country. The fact that even the terrorist attack in Burgas was politicized shows that in the coming months every important social issue

will be the subject of disputes and discussions by political parties.

The economic situation in the country, especially inflation and growing unemployment, have escalated social tensions. An increasing number of industry associations and syndicates have requested wage increases. This may result in a wave of protests in the winter, which would be used by the opposition parties.

The new Supreme Judicial Council is burdened with a lot of expectations to move forward with the reform of the judiciary and to draw up transparent mechanisms and procedures, both in personnel selection and in performance evaluation. The election of Prosecutor General, which will be one of the first tasks of the new SJC, will be of paramount importance with regard to combating organized crime and corruption. The expectations are for a transparent process of election and competition among established authorities and professionals. This is especially important in view of the on-going monitoring of the country under the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism.

2. In the time until the elections the GERB ruling party will focus mainly on campaigning and highlighting the accomplishments of the government. The trend of decreasing confidence in the party is continuing and it will be a major challenge for the party in power ahead of the vote.

Delayed reforms in health care and in the public sector are less and less likely to happen. GERB have practically started their election campaign engaging the entire government in numerous public events related to the construction of infrastructure projects, which are covered abundantly by the media.

Apparently GERB, similarly to previous governments, will be using the trump card of pre-election increase of wages and pensions, which may impact negatively the economic recovery of the country in the medium term.

On the other hand, tensions within the GERB party are growing. Various lobbies and influence groups are already fighting each other over seats on the party election lists.

3. The election of Emil Kabaivanov as UDF leader made the split in the Blue Coalition more real. The UDF is now divided into two camps. One is led by the former leader Martin Dimitrov, Vanyo Sharkov, and other parliamentarians who will conduct common policy with DSB in the parliamentary faction of the Blue Coalition. The other camp is headed by the new UDF leader supported by Boris Markov and Rumen Hristov who pursue a line of rapprochement with GERB and are looking for a new coalition formula excluding Ivan Kostov's DSB. This division in the Blue party has a very negative effect on its electoral potential. The traditional right in Bulgaria running in the elections in two separate blocks diminishes their chances of being elected in the next parliament.

DSB and the group around Martin Dimitrov will be looking for partners among other smaller right-wing parties like Petya Stavreva's United Agrarians and Yordan Nehrizov's social-democrats. It will hardly bring them success in the elections, however.

Leadership fights in the right-wing parties, and the outside influence of other political parties and groups hamper the unification of the traditional Bulgarian right.

There are divisions in the local UDF and DSB party cells as well. In a number of places in the country there is a spill-over to Meglena Kuneva's new party. This development further decreases the chances of UDF and DSB overcoming the 4% election threshold.

4. The terrorist attack in Burgas amplified the anti-Islamic rhetoric of 'Ataka' and Volen Siderov. Siderov will further increase his populist criticism of the government in the area of national security, against the policy of Roma integration and Roma-related petty crime. On the other hand, he will make use

of typical extreme populism against foreign investors, monopolies, protectionism for Bulgarian business, price controls, etc.

A trend of unification of nationalistic formations is under way. The involvement of Krasimir Karakachanov's VMRO-BND in this process indicates that nationalists in Bulgaria are looking at a broader alliance for the next elections. Opinion polls in the last few years have shown a nationalist electoral potential of 6 – 8%. It is still questionable, however, whether 'Ataka' and VMRO-BND will manage to mobilize the major part of this potential.

5. In the past three months OJ has yielded totally to GERB and become an instrument of defamatory PR against its political opponents from the opposition. The parliamentary inquiry committee, which was set up on Yane Yanev's proposal and was supported by GERB to investigate corruption in the high echelons of power, will probably take up issues related to the previous government. Its work will hardly bring any real result; it will rather aim at drawing public attention to well-known cases which did not lead to real law-suits.

A new political project is forming around OJ with the participation of the businessman, Veselin Mareshki. This is yet another indicator that the creation of 'spoiler' parties with GERB support will be part of the government's pre-election tactics.

In the coming months Yanev will stake on strong populism and criticism against GERB's opponents. The use of discrediting information and political smear to slander the political opponents is a typical OJ tactic, which was aimed until recently against the ruling party, and its use again is not to be excluded. Yanev's opportunistic turn to GERB shows a lack of principle which can hardly motivate the voters to support his party in the elections.

6. Stanishev's election as PES leader gave BSP strong legitimacy abroad, which may turn out to be an important factor in the course of

the campaign next year. This will further close the party's ranks around its leader and leadership fights will remain in the background. The signatures collected for a referendum on Belene NPP evidenced the mobilization resources of BSP on the eve of the elections. Regardless of the fact that the project remains economically controversial, this issue will continue to be a leading election issue in the coming months and BSP will exploit it in the context of rising consumer prices of electricity.

Within the party, Stanishev continues to isolate the functionaries who were close to former president Parvanov. This process is likely to go on during the nominations for the election lists. It may provoke tensions in some local party cells.

7. MRF is growing more and more critical of the ruling party. It was no coincidence that in its declaration at the opening of the new parliamentary session MRF called for dis-

solution of the National Assembly and holding early parliamentary elections. Relations between GERB and MRF will be increasingly tense and hostile. One reason for this is the attempts of GERB to break up the MRF party monopoly in areas of mixed population. Finding ways to consolidate its electorate is a major challenge for MRF, given the risk of spillover of the traditional MRF vote as a result of the creation of the new party by Kasim Dal.

8. The Bulgaria of the Citizens Movement led by Meglena Kuneva will attract stronger public attention. Opinion polls indicate that the party is almost certain to be elected in the new parliament. Kuneva firmly stated her intention to run independently and avoids any questions about potential coalitions in the new parliament. The new party positioned itself to the right and will seek membership in the European People's Party.

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Acronyms of political parties:

GERB – Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria

BSP – Bulgarian Socialist Party

MRF – Movement of Rights and Freedoms

UDF – Union of Democratic Forces

DSB – Democrats for Strong Bulgaria

OLJ – Order, Legality and Justice

VMRO – BND – Internal Macedonian revolutionary Organization – Bulgarian National Movement

NFSB – National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria

PES – Party of European Socialists



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