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## Political Parties Development in Bulgaria

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- On the eve of the parliamentary elections, trust in institutions and the political elite in general plummeted. The scandal related to the election of a constitutional judge eroded further the authority of the National Assembly, which is currently one of the institutions with the lowest approval rating in the country. The low level of trust in institutions and politicians is a premise for a rise in the populist mood in the country and, as a consequence, for a strong protest vote in the elections.
- The split in the UDF ended the tension that had been lingering for over a year between the two wings of the party. Notwithstanding the UDF split, the Blue Coalition still exists as a party project. The creation of the Unity National Union by the group of Martin Dimitrov and Nadezhda Neinski, and the talks which were started with DSB and other right-wing parties will most probably result in the signing of a coalition agreement expanding the format of the Blue Coalition.
- “Ataka” keeps amplifying its radical nationalist rhetoric, which indicates that one of the main clashes in the upcoming elections will be along the lines of nationalism. “Ataka” attempts to take maximum advantage of events like the terrorist act in Sarafovo, the trial for radical Islam in Pazardjik or the MRF stance on the Balkan War.
- The referendum on the development of nuclear energy in Bulgaria is the BSP’s major priority in the coming month; it will serve as a general rehearsal for the parliamentary elections. The party will try to mobilize the voters’ body en masse, notwithstanding the expected low turnout.

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## 1. The political situation

The political situation over the last quarter was particularly dynamic and imbued with tension and conflict. The petition for a referendum on the construction of the Belene Nuclear Plant (NPP), initiated by BSP, provoked disputes among the political parties in the country. The argument was over the BSP request to have the referendum question repeat the wording of the petition question: "Should Bulgaria develop nuclear energy by constructing a nuclear power plant on the Belene site?"

A number of jurists and politicians from different political parties were doubtful as to whether this wording of the question was in line with the Constitution, since the construction of any investment project was within the prerogatives of the executive power rather than in the competences of the National Assembly.

The Act on the direct participation of citizens in government and local government stipulates that national referenda may be held only on matters within the competence of the National Assembly.

President Plevneliev initiated consultations with the parliamentary political parties with a view to reaching consensus on the question of the referendum. The President suggested that the question should read: "Shall we develop nuclear energy by building new capacities?" He believed this to be the correct question of principle, which removed any doubts as to its constitutionality. The BSP did not accept the wording and claimed that their question corresponded to the requirements of the Constitution.

At the consultations with the President GERB stated that they would support the BSP question in spite of its non-constitutionality. The ruling party explained it with the concern that if they decided to change the question they would be accused by the BSP

of disregard for direct democracy and the people's voice. The Blue Coalition was adamant that the Belene NPP was not profitable and should not be implemented while the question itself was untenable and unconstitutional. "Ataka" stated that it supported the construction of the Belene NPP and did not believe the question should be re-worded since the people had signed already under the petition wording. The MRF were also of the view that the question should remain as submitted by BSP.

GERB changed their initial decision to support the BSP question and tabled their own proposal for a referendum with the following question: "Do you support the development of nuclear energy in Bulgaria by constructing a new nuclear power plant?" This wording was approved by the National Assembly with the votes of GERB. The BSP refused to take part in the vote and stated that it supplanted the will of over 700,000 citizens who had signed the petition. Following the decision of the National Assembly, President Plevneliev issued a decree timing the referendum for January 27, 2013.

According to the Act, in order for the referendum to be valid, the number of voters should equal the number of those who participated in the last elections, and half of them should have voted in favor. Many believe that this level of turnout is highly unlikely. If over 20% of eligible voters were to take part in the referendum, however, and half of them supported the proposal, the matter would be decided definitively by the National Assembly in a period of three months.

The election of a member of the Constitutional Court from the National Assembly quota provoked a powerful public and political reaction. Judge Veneta Markovska from the Supreme Administrative Court was elected to the Constitutional Court with the votes of GERB, the MRF and several MPs from the "Coalition for Bulgaria" parliamentary faction.

Markovska was nominated by independent parliamentarians who had declared allegiance to GERB. Her election took place in spite of a written warning accusing her of power-brokerage addressed to the Legal Affairs Committee of the National Assembly. A reaction of the European Commission followed. EC Spokesperson Olivier Bailly stated that the EC was seriously concerned about Markovska's election because of doubts regarding corruption and power-brokerage, which were disregarded by the National Assembly. Olivier Bailly also said that this case might bring about an additional report on Bulgaria under the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism.

Following this statement, President Plevneliev was quick to express his concern over the reaction of Brussels and described it as a serious signal to be taken into account by the Bulgarian institutions.

The reaction of Bulgaria's ruling establishment was contradictory – some described Olivier Bailly's statement as an unofficial view, others – like Foreign Minister Mladenov – as interference in the country's internal affairs.

When it became clear that this was the official position of Brussels, a hearing of Markovska took place in the Legal Affairs Committee whereby she tried to exonerate herself from the accusations against her. A letter from the parliamentary Legal Affairs Committee Chairperson Iskra Fidosova to the European Commission followed, whereby she practically defended Markovska's election, stating that Parliament had followed the established procedure and the election process was transparent and legitimate.

Markovska refused to step back, regardless of even the Prime Minister's public appeals to do so. Finally the President interfered by declining to be present in the Constitutional Court at her swearing in, which practically passed a censure on her taking the office. A decision of the National Assembly

followed to cancel Markovska's election and a new procedure was started for the election of a constitutional judge.

There is one more important election that has drawn public attention during the past month. One of the first major tasks of the newly elected Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) is the election of a new Prosecutor General. President Plevneliev had already nominated the outgoing Prosecutor General Boris Velchev, whose term was to expire in January 2013, as constitutional judge from the President's quota. Upon assuming his new office, Velchev resigned as Prosecutor General. The Director of the National Investigation Service Boiko Naidenov, who was one of Boris Velchev's deputies, was selected as Prosecutor General *ad interim*.

The SJC started the procedure for the election of a new Prosecutor General and approved the election rules which prescribe electronic voting by the SJC members and no paper ballot with the names of the candidates, as it used to be. This decision was severely criticized by a number of NGOs, since electronic voting does not guarantee a secret ballot. It was also decided that the voting shall not follow alphabetical order, but the order in which the nominations have come in. This means that if the first nomination to be voted gets the necessary 17 votes, the remaining nominations shall not be put to a vote. This decision was also opposed by the Chairman of the Supreme Court of Cassation Lazar Gruev, who is an SJC member by rights.

Right after the new election rules were approved, several SJC members submitted the nomination of the chairman of the Plovdiv District Court Sotir Tsatsarov. His name had appeared in the media a few months earlier as GERB's candidate for the position of Prosecutor General. After Tsatsarov's nomination, on several occasions Prime Minister Borisov and Interior Minister Tsvetanov

gave a positive assessment of this nomination publicly in the media. It raised doubts among the legal community that the new election rules favor Tsatsarov.

Two more nominations were submitted for the position of Prosecutor General – of Deputy Prosecutor General Galina Toneva, endorsed by the prosecutors' guild, and of Borislav Sarafov who heads the Specialized Prosecution of Appeal.

President Rossen Plevneliev pointed out that the election of a Prosecutor General is of crucial importance and he would carefully oversee the process. By force of the Constitution, the President may veto the Prosecutor General elected by the SJC, but he can do so just once. If the nomination is voted again the President is obliged to issue a decree to appoint the approved candidate. Plevneliev also stated that all candidates for the office of Prosecutor General should present clear concepts and defend them publicly. He also spoke in favor of transparent election rules.

The strong pressure regarding the questionable election rules may lead to their reconsideration by the SJC in order to avoid the risk of an illegitimate election of the Prosecutor General, given the close attention in this matter on the part of the European institutions as well.

In mid-November Gazprom and the Bulgarian Energy Holding signed an investment decision for the construction of the South Stream project through Bulgaria's territory. Gazprom and Bulgargaz also signed the new long-term contract for the supply of natural gas. Prime Minister Borisov announced that the lowest possible price was negotiated. In his view, there will be a more than 20% drop in the gas price as of January 2013. It is a ten-year contract. Prime Minister Borisov also said that he was not in a position to announce the negotiated gas price because of the contractual

confidentiality clauses, but that the price was the lowest possible for countries that do not invest in the exploration of gas fields in Russia.

During the past quarter, parties from both sides of the political spectrum have harshly criticized the position expressed by the MRF regarding the Balkan War. On the occasion of the centennial commemoration of the Balkan War, the MRF-dominated Municipal Council of Kardjali refused to proclaim *Honorary Citizen In Memoriam* the town liberator Gen. Vasil Delov.

Sharp reaction followed by GERB, the BSP and "Ataka" who described the MRF behavior as provocative. The situation was aggravated further following a statement by the MRF leader Ahmed Dogan who qualified the Balkan War as ethnic cleansing of the Turkish ethos in the liberated territories. Dogan declared that a common review of the Balkan War was necessary in order to reach a realistic assessment of its importance.

All of the above indicates that, as the elections draw closer, the nationalist political language will grow harsher. This is also evidenced by the strong reactions regarding the trial in Pazardjik against the 13 imams accused of preaching radical Islam. The MRF described the trial as politically motivated, while the nationalists from VMRO and "Ataka" stated that radical Islam was on the rise in the country and represented a national security threat. At the same time, rallies and protests, organized both by the Muslim community and by the nationalists, took place in front of the court-house in Pazardjik.

The Sarafovo suicide bombing intensified further the fears of an enhanced terrorist threat in the country. The government is still cautious in naming the perpetrators, since there is no conclusive evidence so far to this effect. It was announced, however, that progress had been made in the investigation and that the terrorist act was prepared outside Bulgaria.

## 2. Characteristics and development of the party system

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

#### 2.1.1. GERB

During the last quarter changes have occurred in a number of GERB party organizations. The Regional Governor of Plovdiv, Zdravko Dimitrov, became the new GERB coordinator for the region, replacing the deputy Dimitar Lazarov. The replacement was caused by the loss of the by-election in Kalofer, where the GERB candidate for mayor got just 42 votes and the BSP candidate won the election by over 90%.

The GERB regional coordinator in Kyustendil was also replaced because the party sustained a dramatic loss in the municipal elections last summer. The previous coordinator, MP Valentin Mikev, was replaced with another parliamentarian from GERB, Kiril Kalfin.

The most significant replacement of a regional party coordinator happened in Sofia, where one of the most influential GERB activists, the ex-chairman of the Sofia Municipal Council Andrey Ivanov resigned. In a letter to the GERB leadership he explained his decision with "a desire to prevent prejudiced political speculations with his name in the upcoming election campaign by political parties as a compensation for the lack of arguments." Over recent years Andrey Ivanov's name was scandalously implicated on several occasions in a conflict of interest, which Ivanov continues to deny. Ivanov's seat was taken by the party's administrative secretary Tsvetomir Paunov.

Changes also occurred in GERB's parliamentary faction. The GERB MP Menda Stoyanova, Chairman of the Budget Committee, was elected Deputy Chairperson of the National Assembly to replace Anastas Anastasov, who became constitutional judge.

Vyara Petrova, an MP from GERB, resigned from Parliament and as the party's municipal coordinator in the town of Karnobat. The reason was that in a letter to the temporary parliamentary committee on high-level corruption BSP parliamentarians blew the whistle on her about a conflict of interest. She was blamed for exerting pressure on the Bourgas regional labor bureau to grant her husband's company vouchers to the amount of BGN 200,000 under the Human Resources Development Program. There was yet another accusation from a different source implicating Vyara Petrova's mother in gaining exuberant sums of money under different European programs. The Commission for Prevention and Ascertainment of Conflict of Interest will also look into this case.

The GERB Euro-parliamentarian Emil Stoyanov, brother of former President Petar Stoyanov, resigned as MEP. The official motives for the resignation were personal and family reasons. His seat in the European Parliament was taken by the deputy and chairperson of the GERB youth organization Monika Panayotova.

Rumyana Zheleva was nominated again by GERB as deputy-chair of the European People's Party but was not re-elected. She received 266 votes at the EPP congress in Bucharest and took the penultimate 12<sup>th</sup> place.

#### 2.1.2. UDF and DSB

During the past quarter the symptoms of a split in the UDF, which first appeared at the beginning of the year, reached their logical outcome. Many of the iconic figures of the party and its parliamentarians were either expelled or left the UDF.

This happened after a series of scandals which culminated in Boiko Borisov's offer to the UDF to nominate the new constitutional judge from the parliamentary quota.

When the nominated judge Veneta Markovska lost public credit, the Prime Minister and GERB leader Boiko Borisov declared that his party would support any UDF nomination for constitutional judge. The UDF leadership responded with the nomination of former President Petar Stoyanov.

Not a single UDF parliamentarian from the Blue Coalition agreed, however, to put forward that nomination in the National Assembly, the main reason being that GERB was attempting to shift onto the UDF the responsibility for Veneta Markovska's failed election. The "blue" MPs stated that Petar Stoyanov was not the candidate of the UDF but of GERB. The "Blue Coalition" also stated that, had GERB been sincere towards them, it would have supported the nomination for constitutional judge of Ekaterina Mihailova from DSB right away, at the time of the first election round.

With the UDF parliamentarians refusing to sponsor Petar Stoyanov's nomination, he announced that he could not accept the nomination because of a number of international commitments he had undertaken and could not give up.

Following the failure of Petar Stoyanov's nomination, the UDF leadership called an extraordinary National Council session, which resulted in expulsion from the party of MPs Martin Dimitrov, Vanyo Sharkov and Dimo Gyaurov on the grounds of lowering the prestige of the party with their conduct and public statements. Immediately after the expulsion of the three MPs more UDF politicians left the party. The first one was MEP Nadezhda Neinski and the other UDF parliamentarians. Party organizations from around the country, such as those in the towns of Svishtov and Veliko Tarnovo, also announced that they were leaving the UDF. Other local organizations are also expected to quit, as the leadership of the party youth organization has already done.

In early December the politicians who quit the UDF started a new civic alliance, the "Unity" National Union, which will work for the unification of the traditional right-wing parties. This alliance was actually first set up by Martin Dimitrov and Nadezhda Neinski as a faction in the UDF but the National Council of the party did not grant it official status, despite the party statutes allowing for it.

The main goal of the new alliance is to build a united right-wing party based on the Blue Coalition. Nadezhda Neinski declared that she had been authorized by the 70 founding members of the alliance to hold talks for the continuation of the Blue Coalition project.

The representatives of the former UDF youth organization are among the founders of the "Unity" National Union. The former youth leader of the UDF, Hristo Panchugov, said that the founders of the new alliance were guided by the conviction that "more than ever before, the country needs a modern authentic right".

Nadezhda Neinski underlined that the upcoming talks for the creation of the united right-wing party would be conducted with the leadership of the Democrats for Strong Bulgaria party, as well as with other smaller right-wing parties. According to her, the differences with the UDF consist in the opposing views regarding the past and what path to take in the future.

Neinski believes that "setting up joint ruling political bodies in a new agreement will be a step forward."

In early December the DSB held the party's 10<sup>th</sup> National Convention. It adopted a resolution regarding the party's participation in the elections next year. It says that the DSB's main goal is "to take the country out of the economic crisis, to terminate criminal behavior and misuse of the monopolies, to restore the Bulgarians' trust in the state and

to secure jobs, prosperity and security for the citizens." The DSB declared their readiness to keep and develop the Blue Coalition in order to achieve genuine unification of "the democratic voices in opposition to GERB, with the aim of preventing the supplanting of the right." The main DSB document makes it clear that "there will be no coalition with the BSP and the MRF under any circumstances" and that the DSB will participate in the elections as a categorical opposition to GERB and "the sole right alternative to their post-communism."

The party forum nominated the leaders of the party ballot tickets for the elections. Ivan Kostov will lead the party tickets of the 23<sup>rd</sup> electoral district in Sofia and the electoral district of the town of Plovdiv. The chairman of the Sofia party organization Ivan Ivanov will be the leader on the tickets for the 24<sup>th</sup> electoral district in Sofia and the city of Stara Zagora. Ekaterina Mihailova will also lead two electoral tickets – for the 25<sup>th</sup> electoral district in Sofia and the town of Shumen. The leaders for all electoral districts were nominated. The DSB campaign manager Veselin Metodiev explained that the tickets may have to be rearranged later to reckon with the unification of the traditional right in the Blue Coalition format.

### 2.1.3. "Ataka"

During the past quarter "Ataka" has intensified its radical nationalist rhetoric. As already mentioned, it was triggered by the lawsuit in Pazardjik and the MRF stance on the Balkan War. On several occasions "Ataka" came out with declarations of protest in the National Assembly condemning the conduct of the MRF. Moreover, the party submitted a proposal to President Plevneliev for changing the name of the town of Kardjali to the name of Gen. Vasil Delov.

It is evident that during the election campaign next year "Ataka" will interpret every issue through a nationalist perspective.

Relations between "Ataka" and VMRO are growing closer. Most probably early next year the two parties will sign a coalition agreement. It is possible that other nationalist formations join them. Talks to that effect are taking place now, which shows that there may be a broader alliance of nationalist organizations for the elections next year, with a greater chance of exceeding the 4% threshold.

In early December "Ataka" published a draft of their election program, where the party's Euro-skepticism comes to the foreground. It reads that "The EU is a threat to democracy and the national sovereignty of the member-states" and that it is a "Soviet Union reborn". According to "Ataka", Bulgaria is threatened with loss of identity and fading away unless the EU institutional framework is modified.

"Ataka" also proposes the dissolution of all concession contracts with foreign companies and the nationalization of the electric power providers. Another idea of the party is an increase of the minimum monthly wage to BGN 1000 and of the lowest pension to BGN 500, without suggesting any financial sources for such increases.

### 2.1.4. O LJ

At the beginning of November the O LJ led by Yane Yanev and the Liberal Alliance party of the pharmaceuticals businessman Veselin Mareshki signed a coalition agreement to run jointly in the upcoming parliamentary elections. The new coalition positioned itself as right-of-center and patriotic. Its main priorities will be the reforms in the health-care sector and the retirement system, as well as cheaper drugs.

Yanev defined the BSP, the "Bulgaria of the Citizens" Movement and the MRF as the main opponents of the new coalition.



He further outlined as his personal political goal to stop Meglena Kuneva from attaining a position in government and hence “supplant the priorities of the state”.

Mareshki explained the decision about the coalition with Yanev with the motive that “the OJ is a party that has never been part of the government of the country and is not, therefore, accountable for its condition”. In his view the OJ was the only party waging a real fight against corruption.

The OJ leader also stated that if the new coalition would have a say in the next government, one of the goals would be “to hold responsible those who drained the resources of the state”. Yanev promised that the coalition party ticket would not contain a single minister or deputy minister from the entire transition period. The OJ leader announced that before them lay “a major and sacred cause” – “to commit to history this vicious post-totalitarian model” and “put an end to the period of transition”. According to Yanev, this could only happen by convening a Constituent Assembly and adopting a new constitution of the country.

Following the split in the UDF, the Yanev-Mareshki coalition launched an appeal to right voters to join them. The main message of the appeal is the need for a strong and united right which can oppose an eventual mandate of “the new three-party coalition of the BSP, the MRF and Kuneva”. Yanev and Mareshki point out in their appeal that 23 years after the changes “the blue idea is in collapse”. They sustain that the right needs a new political concept, which will be “a counterpoint to hitherto corrupt practices, criminal privatization and a battle to appease the ego of a handful of party bosses.” They also call on all past leaders of the right, former ministers and nomenclature cadres participating in the government of the country to retire from political life.

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

### **2.2.1. BSP**

During the past quarter the BSP has intensified its opposition rhetoric. Sergei Stanishev's election as the PES leader has impacted positively both on his own approval rating as a politician and the BSP as a party. This was registered by several polling agencies, which also recorded a lessening gap between GERB and BSP.

At the beginning of December the BSP held a session of its National Council, which scheduled the 48th congress of the party on February 16. Sergei Stanishev outlined as a main goal of the upcoming election the ousting of GERB from power. Stanishev also declared that Bulgaria needed a new perspective as a democratic, competitive and social European state.

The BSP leader pointed out that the GERB government had turned “Bulgaria into a ghetto of poverty, a police state controlling all the institutions and the judiciary.” After the elections, according to Stanishev, the BSP and the people will be able to build together a modern economy and a free society.

During the National Council session deputy Yanaki Stoilov laid emphasis on the importance of the upcoming referendum for the elections. He pointed out the need to mobilize all citizens, not just the BSP members and supporters, to cast their vote. In his view, this would be decisive for the party's performance in the elections. Stoilov stated that the GERB government would be held accountable politically for having stopped the Belene NPP project. In his view, the participation and the result of the referendum might provide a powerful signal for a change in the government of the country. Stoilov suggested that BSP demanded the nationalization of the electric power distributing companies, thus enabling the country to trade in electric power without intermediaries.

During the past quarter BSP has launched one more time the idea of abolishing the 10% flat tax and introducing progressive income taxation. The socialists maintain that the people with higher income should bear a greater burden of solidarity in the crisis.

At the end of the year, BSP started campaigning more vigorously for the referendum on the construction of a new nuclear power plant. The party declared that this was going to be its main priority next month.

### 2.2.2. MRF

At the end of November, the MRF youth organization – YMRF – held its sixth national conference and elected a new leader, Ilhan Kiu-chuk. The past YMRF leader Djeihan Ibryamov withdrew because he had turned 35. The conference was attended by 379 delegates. The YMRF is the largest youth organization in Europe, with more than 20,000 members.

During the past quarter it has become clear that the MRF will start party organizations abroad – in Spain and in Brussels, where the party has thousands of supporters. According to MRF data, more than 150,000 people from the regions of mixed population have left the country in the past year.

As mentioned already, the MRF qualified the trial against the 13 imams in Pazardjik as political and declared its intention to approach the European institutions in this regard. The congress of the European Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ELDE) adopted, on the MRF initiative, a resolution condemning “the subversion of religious peace by excessive and unfounded charges against Bulgarian citizens officially representing the Muslim creed.”

In early December the MRF announced consultations in the National Assembly for initiating yet another non-confidence vote against Borisov’s government.

A major challenge the MRF is faced with on the eve of the elections is the new party

formed by Kassim Dahl and Korman Ismailov – the “Freedom and Dignity” People’s Party (FDPP). At the party’s constituent congress Kassim Dahl pointed out that the FDPP was based on the values of human life, freedom and dignity, which had become questionable in the years of transition. Dahl indicated also that the new party was not duplicating a similar attempt made by the splinter group of Osman Oktai and Guner Tahir who left the MRF a decade earlier because “these people are secret service agents like Ahmed Dogan.”

The FDPP shall stand for improving the quality of life of the Bulgarian citizens, for overcoming “poverty and misery by achieving free and just human life.”

Korman Ismailov was elected chairman of the new “Freedom and Dignity” People’s Party. Members of the leadership also are Kassim Dahl, Dr. Miuesser Solak, Vesselin Penev, Orhan Koshudju, Kristian Yonchev, Mithat Mehmed, Ognyan Isaev, Kemal Tinev, Dr. Emilia Tosheva, Tassim Tassim and Mustafa Mustafa.

A congratulatory address by Prime Minister Erdogan was read out at the constituent congress.

## 3. Public Opinion

According to a November survey of the National Center for Public Opinion Research (NCPOR) the electoral difference between GERB and BSP continues to shrink. GERB remains the first political force, with the support of 24.5% of the voters. Compared to September, however, the support for the ruling party has gone down by 2%. BSP is supported by 19% of the voters, which amounts to a 1.5% increase over the past two months.

According to the survey, the MRF and Meglena Kuneva’s “Bulgaria of the Citizens” are certain to make it into the next Parliament. The two parties have almost

equal positions – 6.4% would vote for the MRF and 6.2% - for the “Bulgaria of the Citizens” party. Kuneva’s party, though, has added 2% of support since September.

The NCPOR survey appraises the support for the traditional right parties of the Blue Coalition format (DSB and UDF). The coalition has the support of 3.6 % of Bulgarians but the two parties will not run as a coalition, especially after the split in the UDF. Thus the chances of the traditional right entering the next National Assembly remain uncertain.

“Ataka” gets the support of 3% of the respondents, which shows that it has a realistic chance of overcoming the 4% threshold, especially in a coalition with Karakachanov’s VMRO.

The NMSS, OLI and VMRO register support of around 1%.

The list of the most approved politicians in Bulgaria is headed by President Rossen Plevneliev who has the approval of 52%, followed by the Minister of Regional Development Lilyana Pavlova approved by 50% of the voters. Prime Minister Borisov comes third with 43% approval rating but 49% disapproval.

NCPOS data indicate that the BSP Chairman Sergei Stanishev continues to be the most approved leader of a parliamentary faction, with a rating of 28%. His election to the PES presidency impacted his image positively.

The leaders of the remaining political factions keep the typical levels of support. The UDF Chairman Emil Kabaivanov is unknown to over 80%, as a result of which his approval is just 2%.

Since the start of the summer there has been a downward tendency in the approval of Parliament and the government, with growing disapproval. In early November the respondents who negatively appraised Parliament were four times more than those who believed that the institution was working well (68% to 17%). The approval rating

of the National Assembly is down by 5% since September, while disapproval is up by the same percentage.

The approval of the government is also going down. Just one third of the voters, 29%, appraise the executive positively, which is 2% less than in September. The disapproval of the government is twice as high as the approval – 57%.

As regards the upcoming referendum on the construction of a new nuclear power plant, the NCPOS shows that 62.5% of potential voters will vote in favor and 37.5% will vote against.

#### 4. General conclusions and forecasts

1. The developments of the past quarter are symptomatic of a confrontational election campaign in 2013. Tensions between the ruling party and the opposition are growing.

On the eve of the elections the level of trust in the institutions and the political elite in general is critically low. The scandalous incident with the election of a constitutional judge undermined further the National Assembly’s reputation and it has become one of the most disapproved institutions of the country.

The low level of trust in institutions is a premise for an escalation of the populist mood in the country and it may provoke a strong protest vote in the elections.

2. The downward trend in the support for GERB has continued during the past quarter and the difference with its main opponent, BSP, is diminishing. The reasons for it are multi-faceted – on the one hand, the economic crisis in the country has increased the discontent of a large part of the population and, on the other hand, the conflicting decisions and reactions of the party regarding the nomination and the election of constitutional judges increased the perceptions about behind-the-scenes arrangements,

which put off the voters. Another reason for the diminishing trust is the failed reforms in health care, education, and the retirement and the administrative systems.

GERB's major challenge in the coming months is whether or not they will manage to reverse the trend of dropping electoral support.

3. The split in the UDF ended the lingering tension between the two wings of the party during the past year. The expulsion of the UDF deputies from the party indicated that the UDF risks capsulation and isolation. The claims that the UDF is increasingly becoming GERB's minion seem more and more credible, especially after the attempt at nominating Petar Stoyanov for a constitutional judge. The party leader Kabaivanov continues to be unidentifiable nationally, as evidenced by the polls.

Notwithstanding the split in the UDF, the Blue Coalition continues to exist as a party project.

The creation of the "Unity" National Union by the group of Martin Dimitrov and Nadezhda Neinski, and the initiated talks with the DSB and other right parties will probably soon lead to the signing of a coalition agreement for expanding the format of the Blue Coalition.

4. 'Ataka' has intensified further its nationalist rhetoric, which shows that one of the major clashes during the upcoming election campaign will be along the lines of nationalism. The terrorist act in Sarafovo, the trial against the radical Islamists in Pazardjik, and the MRF position on the Balkan War are events that 'Ataka' tries to use fully to its own advantage. The latest polls indicate that the trust in 'Ataka' is growing. An eventual coalition with VMRO and other nationalist organizations enhance 'Ataka's chances of being represented for a third consecutive time in the National Assembly. A more intense nationalist rhetoric may, however, exacerbate ethnic tensions in the country.

5. The coalition between the OLI and the party of the businessman Vesselin Mareshki is the next populist project which will take part in the elections next year. Many describe this coalition as a GERB-sponsored project. Yane Yanev continues to rely on negative PR to discredit the political opponents of the ruling party. During the past months, a number of his media appearances were focused on vehement criticism of Meglena Kuneva and her party "Bulgaria of the Citizens" Movement. This trend is likely to continue during the election campaign.

6. The referendum on nuclear power in Bulgaria is the BSP's main priority for the next month and will serve as a general rehearsal for the elections. The party will strive to mobilize the largest possible number of voters, regardless of the expectations for a low turn-out.

At the elections, the BSP will run in the "Coalition for Bulgaria" format and it is not to be excluded that it may reach out to other left, centrist and social-democratic parties to join the coalition. These intentions have already been declared at several party forums.

Reference needs to be made, however, to some extreme left proposals launched by representatives of the party, such as the idea to nationalize the electric power providers.

7. The exacerbated political discourse of the MRF provoked the response of the nationalist formations. Ahmed Dogan's public statement on the nature of the Balkan War increased the critical attitude to the MRF. This, however, served to consolidate and mobilize the party's electorate.

8. Meglena Kuneva's "Bulgaria of the Citizens" Movement continues to affirm its electoral standing. The latest polls show a certain increase in the support for the party. Kuneva declines at this point to answer the question about eventual coalition partners after the elections. She declared one more time that she was running on her own in the elections and will not be part of any political dealings and arrangements.

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