



Georgi Karasimeonov (Ed.)

BAROMETER

Bulgaria's Political Parties

Year 13, Issue 2
April-June 2013

- The political situation over the past three months has been particularly dynamic and tense and was marked by the May 12th parliamentary elections. The election campaign itself was extremely strained and marred by a series of scandals.
- Oresharski's government started out with the lowest confidence levels of the entire period since the democratic changes. Elections registered the lowest voting turnout, while close to 25% of voters have no parliamentary representation, as the smaller political parties they gave their support to failed to pass the electoral threshold. New protests in the country, triggered by Delyan Peevski's unsuccessful appointment as head of the State Agency for National Security (SANS) have further reinforced political tensions.
- BSP accepted the mandate to form a new government, thus burdening itself with the tremendous responsibility of supporting a minority government in rather difficult and volatile socio-political circumstances. The "Peevski" scandal and subsequent protests have a very negative impact on the party's credibility and that of its leader Stanishev. Tensions within the party itself are growing, while its members and supporters have good cause to be hesitant.
- DPS gained a sure footing within Oresharski's government, with representatives not only among ministers but also deputy-ministers and governors. The appointment of Delyan Peevski, a DPS MP, as head of SANS further intensified negative attitudes towards the party.

CONTENTS

1. The Political Status Quo	2
2. Current Status and Development of the Party System.....	5
2.1. Trends Among Political Parties Represented in Parliament.....	5
2.1.1. Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB)	5
2.1.2. Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP).....	7
2.1.3. Movement for Rights and Freedom (DPS)	8
2.1.4. "Ataka"	9
3. Public Opinion.....	10
4. Main Conclusions and Forecasts.....	11

1. The Political Status Quo

The political situation over the past three months has been particularly dynamic and tense and was marked by the May 12th parliamentary elections. The election campaign itself was extremely strained and marred by a series of scandals.

One such scandal was triggered by indications for listening in on high-ranking politicians, businessmen, protest movement leaders and other active citizens. The information was sent to BSP leader Sergey Stanishev, who then alerted prosecution authorities. Former Interior Minister Tsvetan Tsvetanov was identified as the main culprit behind the tapping.

Following the submission of this information, prosecution authorities initiated four pre-trial proceedings against former and current directors of MIA's Technical Operations Department. The investigation revealed violations in daily operation of equipment, a lack of supervision over its use, as well as a lack of regulations on team member tasking and reporting.

The tapping scandal escalated further after the media leaked a taped conversation between former Prime Minister Boyko Borisov, former Minister of Agriculture Miroslav Naydenov and Sofia City Prosecutor Nikolay Kokinov, discussing how former Minister Naydenov could avoid corruption and malpractice allegations. The three were summoned to explain after the conversation became public knowledge thanks to the media. Nikolay Kokinov gave his statement during a hearing before the Supreme Prosecutor's Office of Cassation, after which he resigned.

The day before the elections, or the so called "day of contemplation", after having received a tip, prosecution officers and SANS agents entered the "Multiprint" printing house, assigned with the printing of ballot-papers for the election. 400,000 additional ballot-papers above the announced and legal-

ly determined circulation number were found there. All political parties reacted and stated their position on the matter. Their actions on the other hand, provoked GERB to declare that the ban against campaigning on the day of contemplation was violated and that elections were flawed. The Central Electoral Commission (CEC), however, announced that no direct campaigning had taken place and the law had been observed.

Party leaders accused each other of attempts to destabilize the country and tamper with election results. In June prosecutors issued a statement that the ballot papers were 480,000 in total and were intended for all multi-mandate election constituencies in the country, as well as abroad. The expertise on how many of those ballot-papers were waste and whether there were any intended to manipulate the vote is expected within the next couple of months.

The early parliamentary elections were held on May 12th. A little over half of the electorate exercised their right to vote. CEC reported a 51.33% voter turnout. GERB received the greatest support with 30.54%. Coalition for Bulgaria finished second with 26.61%, followed by the Movement for Rights and Freedom (DPS) with 11.31% and "Ataka" with 7.30%. Democrats for Strong Bulgaria – Bulgarian Democratic Forum (2.92%), the National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria (3.71%) and the Bulgaria for Citizens Movement (3.35%) have no representatives in the new National Assembly.

The assessment provided by the missions of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) sent mixed signals. According to their conclusions, the elections themselves were well-organized, however, also evident among voters was a high level of distrust in the country's main political institutions.

The organization “Transparency International” estimates that the so-called controlled vote influenced 18.68% of voters. According to its experts, once again, the biggest problem was poor training among many members of the Precinct Election Commissions.

The parliamentary elections of 12 May 2013 were marked by yet another precedent – the party which won the most votes announced it would seek the invalidation of election results. The Constitutional Court allowed the case submitted by 96 GERB MPs to move forward for hearing, the main accusation being that there was campaigning going on, both on the day of contemplation and on election day, which is impermissible under the law.

The National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria and the Order, Law and Justice party on the other hand requested the invalidation of election results in Turkey. Their petition was filed with the Constitutional Court by GERB MPs.

The new 42nd National Assembly was convened at short notice. BSP's Mihail Mikov was elected as Chairperson of the National Assembly, with Maya Manolova (BSP) and Hristo Biserov (DPS) as his deputies. GERB refused to join the parliamentary leadership ranks, stressing that as the biggest parliamentary group they should hold the chairperson post.

Following the announcement of the election results, President Rosen Plevneliev declared he would strive to form a government as quickly as possible and held meetings with all four parties represented in parliament. Although they had won the most votes, GERB fell into isolation when leaders of the other three parties – BSP, DPS and “Ataka” – announced they would not support a government formed by GERB. The result was a rapid return of the mandate, which was then given to the leader of the second largest party represented in parliament – BSP. Sergey Stanishev suggested that President Rosen Plevneliev assign Plamen Oresharski with an exploratory

government-forming mandate, despite the fact that the two parliamentary groups – BSP and DPS, hold only 120 seats or one short of the necessary majority, meaning they would depend on the support of “Ataka”.

At the end of May, Oresharski's cabinet line-up was put to the vote. Volen Siderov, leader of “Ataka”, was the one to provide the necessary vote for reaching a quorum. GERB representatives accused the other parliamentary parties of forming a new utterly unprincipled three-party coalition. BSP and DPS gave their support to the government, GERB MPs voted against, while “Ataka” did not participate in the vote at all.

The new Council of Ministers of Bulgaria consist of: Prime Minister – Plamen Oresharski (former Minister of Finance with the three-party coalition government); Deputy-Prime Minister and Minister of Justice Zinaida Kamenova (who heads the EC Representation Office in Sofia); Deputy-Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior – Tsvetelin Yovchev (former SANS head and Chief of Staff to President Plevneliev); Minister of Foreign Affairs – Kristian Vigenin (MEP from the Left); Minister of Finance – Petar Chobanov (former Chairman of the Financial Supervision Commission, until June 2010); Minister of Defense – Angel Naydenov (Coalition for Bulgaria MP); Minister of Economy and Energy – Dragomir Stoynev (Coalition for Bulgaria MP); Minister of Labor and Social Policy – Hasan Ademov (four times MP for DPS); Minister of Investment Planning – Ivan Danov (lecturer); Minister of Agriculture and Foods – Dimitar Grekov (Rector of the Agricultural University - Plovdiv); Minister of Regional Development – Desislava Terzieva (Director of the Strategic Development and Coordination Directorate at the Bulgarian Council of Ministers since 2011); Minister of Transport, Information Technology and Communications – Danail Papazov (Chief of Port Varna for ten years, appointed

during the National Movement for Stability and Progress government mandate); Minister of Environment and Water – Iskra Mihailova-Koparova (DPS MP); Minister of Health – Tanya Andreeva-Raynova (Coalition for Bulgaria MP in the 42nd National Assembly); Minister of Education and Science – Aneliya Klisarova (Coalition for Bulgaria MP); Minister of Culture – Petar Stoyanovich (former Union of Democratic Forces member, former Chairman of “Gergyovden” Movement and one of the founding members of Meglena Kuneva’s party “Bulgaria for Citizens”); Minister of Youth and Sports – Mariana Georgieva (former parliamentary assistant to DPS leader Lyutvi Mes-tan). 17 deputy-ministers have also been appointed - five with connections with DPS, six from BSP and the rest - technocrats. Tsvetlin Yovchev and Daniela Bobeva were appointed as Deputy-Prime Ministers at a later stage.

Oresharski’s government announced its main priorities in a document entitled “National Priorities of the Government Program. State System, Development, Justice.” The plan stresses the need for urgent measures providing stability and laying the groundwork of a more robust model for restoring economic development, institutional stabilization and strengthening of democratic principles. According to this plan, some of the first steps to be undertaken by the government would include the prevention of a new increase of electricity prices, repaying accumulated state debt to businesses within 3 months, a thorough investigation of state management activities in all spheres, as well as the adoption of legislative measures and actions for sanctioning violations.

The very first among the measures aimed at securing a coordinating and regulating role of the state in the economy envisions the launch of a 10-year economic reindustrialization program, which, along with some other points of Oresharski’s plan meets the recom-

mendations of the latest IMF report on Bulgaria, issued in April this year.

The points on strengthening the labor market can be highlighted as a positive aspect of the plan. These include, among others, measures designed to reinforce the link between education and the labor market, some regulation changes, which would allow various forms of flexible employment, as well as stimulating investment in industries hiring people with lower qualifications.

The assurance that there will be no changes in tax levels and that the country will maintain the currency board is also of particular importance.

One of the government’s first steps was to initiate reforms in CDCOC (Chief Directorate “Combating Organized Crime”) and SANS. The idea is to create a separate State Agency “Technical Operations”, which will then assume the current activities of the Specialized Directorate for Operational Technical Operations (SDOTO), namely interception and surveillance. The agency should be an independent entity within the Council of Ministers. This necessitated the introduction of a bill for amending the current Special Intelligence Means Act. An additional point of discussion was the restoration of the National Bureau for Supervision of Special Intelligence Means, introduced during the final days of the Three-party Coalition’s mandate and later disbanded by GERB’s government.

Amendments to the SANS Act were also adopted at the first reading. The new government’s reforms will restore the investigative functions of SANS, which were revoked when GERB came to power in 2009. Furthermore, the MIA will be released from its obligation to fight serious and organized crime, as CDCOC is being transferred to SANS. With the new changes, the future head of SANS will be appointed by the National Assembly and not through presidential decree following a

proposal by the Prime Minister, which was the case up until now. The idea is to subject SANS to stricter parliamentary supervision. The swift adoption of these amendments, without any public debate on the matter, led to a number of criticisms voiced by the opposition and civil society organizations.

After adopting the changes, parliament elected DPS MP Delyan Peevski as head of SANS. This caused great surprise and a wave of public discontent. Peevski is one of the country's media oligarchs, closely tied to the head of the Corporate Commercial Bank – Tsvetan Vassilev.

Peevski was elected thanks to BSP and DPS's support. GERB MPs voted "against", while those of "Ataka" did not participate in the vote. GERB adopted a declaration, announcing that they had initiated consultations on the matter of early elections, convening a Grand National Assembly and changing the Constitution.

Peevski's nomination intensified tensions within BSP even more. According to some more extreme opinions within BSP, the appointment of Delyan Peevski equals political suicide for the Left. Opposition within the party began considering actions to remove Sergey Stanishev from his leadership post.

President Rosen Plevneliev urged the National Assembly to reconsider its choice for new head of SANS and also stated that the selection procedure was a far cry from the undertaken commitment for transparency, and that he does not approve of the way the choice was made – without any debate, lacking justification and with no concept whatsoever. The President added that his confidence in the government had run out and that he was convening the Advisory Council on National Security. He further stressed that he was not fully withdrawing his support for the government, but that he would be closely observing all their initiatives.

The choice of Delyan Peevski triggered a new wave of protests in the country. More than 55,000 people expressed their support for the protest through one of the social media sites, while in Sofia, close to 10,000 people gathered in front of the buildings of the Council of Ministers and Parliament (a number which reached 15,000 on the third day of protests). Just a few months after the previous protests, people once more took to the streets, this time demanding a new nominee for the position head of SANS, as well as new parliamentary elections. Protesters want not only the resignation of the government, but also changes to the Electoral Code.

Besides Sofia, there were also protests in Plovdiv, Varna, Pazardjik, Veliko Tarnovo, Kardjali, Sliven, Shumen.

As a result, Delyan Peevski made an official statement that he would abide by the NA's decision to revoke his appointment as head of SANS, while PM Oresharski accepted his decision to step down from the post. The Prime Minister announced he would seek public consensus on the nomination for the position as head of SANS and initiate meetings with representatives of the protesters.

2. Status and Development of the Party System

2.1. Trends among Political Parties Represented in Parliament

2.1.1. Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB)

GERB won most votes in the recently held parliamentary elections and received 97 MP seats.

The first statement by the parliamentary group's leader Boyko Borisov, made at the state opening of Parliament, reaffirmed GERB's intent to file a claim for invalidation of the election results with the Constitutional Court. However, he also pledged support for

the new government with regard to priority measures and all laws of crucial importance to the country.

GERB's first steps in the new parliament, according to its leader's words, would include proposals to freeze MP salaries, increase maternity benefit from 240 to 310 BGN, as well as the drawing up of a new Labor Code and adopting the Law on Secondary Education.

GERB fell into isolation within the 42nd National Assembly, one reason for it being the party's style of government for the past four years in power. The opposition had been utterly ignored during that time, leading to acute confrontation. The new ruling majority of BSP and DPS has adopted the same approach towards GERB now, while the former governing party has accused them of revanchism.

Former Prime Minister Boyko Borisov was elected Chairman of the parliamentary group, with Dimitar Glavchev, Iskra Fidossova, Krasimir Velchev and Tsvetan Tsvetanov as his deputies.

GERB refused to nominate a candidate for the post of Deputy-Chairperson of the National Assembly, nor does it take part in the work of the temporary committee on elaboration of rules for the organization and operation of the National Assembly. So far, the party has refused to nominate representatives to any standing committees.

GERB's parliamentary group has left during plenary sessions of the National Assembly on several occasions, resulting in a lack of quorum and in effect blocking the work of parliament.

After Delyan Peevski's election as head of SANS and subsequent protests, GERB announced that they were leaving the National Assembly and heading towards early parliamentary elections. The party's leader Boyko Borisov said GERB's parliamentary group would return to the National Assembly only when parliament started work on changes to the Electoral Code.

On their part, BSP and DPS accused GERB of organizing the protests, thus aiming at destabilizing the country. GERB's Deputy-Chairman Tsvetan Tsvetanov categorically denied any involvement in instigating the protests.

On several occasions Miroslav Naydenov, former Minister of Agriculture in GERB's government, accused Tsvetan Tsvetanov publicly of having listened in on all the ministers in Boyko Borisov's cabinet. According to him, the main blame for GERB's isolation lay with Tsvetanov and the only option for the party to emerge unified and consolidated was to expel him from GERB. If this should fail to happen, Naydenov believed that the party would inevitably split.

Following the elections, tensions arose in GERB's regional structures. Party leaders in Plovdiv and Stara Zagora resigned at the beginning of June. George Ignatov and Nedyalko Nedyalkov stated that they disagreed with leadership policy. Nedyalkov warned of a rift within the party itself, which would only widen unless Tsvetan Tsvetanov was removed. As a result Nedyalkov was expelled from the party. Varna and Lovech also witnessed tensions.

GERB's municipal organization in Petrich sent a letter to its leader Boyko Borisov, stating their loss of faith in GERB as a party of "freedom, responsibility and justice." In this letter, local GERB structures accused Tsvetan Tsvetanov of authoritarianism and the regional leadership of distancing itself from problems within the party. According to GERB's members in Petrich, there were serious tensions within the party's regional organization in Blagoevgrad, which could lead to a split within the party, should the approach adopted by Tsvetanov not be discontinued. As they believed, this could only be achieved through his resignation.

At a meeting in late June, representatives of all the regional structures of GERB

demanded a change of leadership. After the meeting, the assembled members of the party came out with an open letter against the party's Deputy-Chairman Tsvetan Tsvetanov, MP Iskra Fidossova and Administrative Secretary Tsvetomir Paounov.

Two of GERB's founding members - Ivan Petrov, former MP from Haskovo and Pavel Dimitrov, former Regional Coordinator of GERB in Varna, asked Boyko Borisov to remove Tsvetan Tsvetanov and Iskra Fidossova from the parliamentary group, lest "the party would disappear." Pavel Dimitrov explained that the contents of the open letter had already been discussed twice during meetings with GERB's leadership. According to Dimitrov, the origins of interparty tensions lay with the way staff changes in local structures were handled. Members dissatisfied with Tsvetanov said that unless their demands were met, they would support the establishment of a new center-right party project.

After emergency meetings on the spot, Boyko Borisov managed to somewhat quash tensions within the party.

2.1.2. Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP)

The parliamentary group of Coalition for Bulgaria consists of 84 MPs. BSP leader Sergey Stanishev was elected as its Chairman. Alexander Paounov, Atanas Merdjanov, Dimcho Mihalevski, Dora Yankova, Cornelia Ninova, Peter Kurumbashev, Spas Panchev and Yanaki Stoilov are his deputies.

At the state opening of the 42nd National Assembly, BSP leader Sergey Stanishev said that GERB's victory in the elections was solely "arithmetical." He accused the former government of having created two worlds – a virtual one, in which they had fooled people, claiming certain government successes, and a real one, in which, according to Stanishev, people were weary of poverty. Another accusation was that GERB had no desire to solve

existing problems and that they had driven the country to its worst state since the beginning of the transition.

Stanishev announced that BSP would work on a government program which would restore the state system, introduce economic reforms, and overcome the chasm between the government and citizens.

Disagreement processes within BSP began even with the handing over of the government-forming mandate and became even more evident with the appointment of ministers and deputy-ministers. Criticism towards Stanishev was triggered by lack of transparency in the selection process, as well as a clear program. This trend was further deepened after the announcement of deputy-minister appointments. The Socialists showed their misgivings with the fact that their opinions were being ignored when discussing appointments of key government posts.

Growing discontent with party leader Sergey Stanishev intensified greatly after the election of Delyan Peevski as head of SANS. BSP MP George Kadiev said that after the public outrage, triggered by this political decision, Sergey Stanishev should resign in order to preserve the Left. He believed that through this nomination all of the party's supporters had been misled. Kadiev called for an urgent meeting of BSP's National Council so that all regional party leaders could state their opinion on the matter.

BSP's "Vitosha" District Council (Sofia) adopted a declaration calling for the party leader's resignation, as well as the resignation of his Executive Bureau.

In turn, Sergey Stanishev said he had no intention of stepping down, although he described Delyan Peevski's appointment as head of SANS as a political mistake.

A petition for convening a party congress for change of leadership was initiated among BSP members. Former President Georgi Parva-

nov said BSP needed urgent change. According to him, the current party leadership's policy was short-sighted and jeopardized the party's future and its image. Parvanov believed that the party must undertake a thorough analysis of both its personnel policy and the policies it sought to implement. He further criticized the form of the new government – mainly the lack of clear principles under which it was formed, but also the decision making process within it.

Strong criticism towards Stanishev's policy was also voiced by Rumén Petkov, Tatyana Doncheva, Stefan Danailov, Kiril Dobrev and Georgi Kadiev, some of whom also demanded the party leader's resignation.

During the BSP's National Council meeting and after stormy discussions, Stanishev and his Executive Bureau received a vote of confidence by the majority of members.

A European Socialist Party Conference was held in Sofia at the height of the protests. The forum was attended by the President of the European Parliament, Martin Schulz, as well as the President of the Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament - Hannes Swoboda. Both gave their support to Sergey Stanashev as leader of PES and expressed confidence that the Oresharski government would overcome the difficult situation and implement the reforms the country needs.

2.1.3. Movement for Rights and Freedom (DPS)

The parliamentary group of DPS in the 42nd National Assembly consists of 36 MPs. Lyutvi Mestan was elected Chairman, while Aliosman Imamov, Yordan Tsonev, Kamen Kostadinov, Nigyar Djafer and Tuncher Kardjaliev are his deputies.

During his speech at the state opening of the National Assembly, the parliamentary group Chairman of DPS Lyutvi Mestan said

this was the first parliament which would not be dominated by a "messianic figure." He expressed his preferences for an expert (technocrat) government and called on Boyko Borisov to return the exploratory mandate as soon as possible as neither BSP, nor DPS would support a government formed by GERB.

Mestan further announced that the main objective of the new majority was to restore parliamentary democracy in the country and the rule of law and to mend the damage done by GERB's government.

Despite assurances for the formation of an expert-led government, a number of political figures joined Oresharski's cabinet. The opposition, in the face of GERB accused DPS of having too much influence in the new cabinet and that they largely dictated the decision-making process, "twisting BSP's arms."

In fact, DPS received a number of posts in the government - not just at a ministerial level, but also among deputy-ministers and regional governors. The appointment of deputy-ministers and regional governors was delayed for nearly three weeks, one of the reasons being tough negotiations between BSP and DPS.

DPS also received chairman positions in key parliamentary committees such as: the Economic Committee, to be headed by Aliosman Imamov; the Budget and Finance Committee (Jordan Tsonev); the Legal Affairs Committee (Hristo Biserov); the Defense Committee (Yanko Yankov); the Healthcare Committee (Nigyar Djafer); and the Transport, Information Technology and Communications Committee (Kamen Kostadinov).

Musa Palev's appointment as Regional Governor of Blagoevgrad evoked particularly strong reactions. Protesters blocked the building of the regional administration and prevented Palev entering his office at his inauguration. He managed to go to work only after the police intervened and opened a path through protesters.

Ljutvi Mestan reacted angrily to protests in Blagoevgrad and said that such behavior created ethnic tension. According to him protests against Musa Palev were not motivated by his abilities, but were of ethnic origin.

DPS firmly backed the nomination of De-lyan Peevski as head of SANS. The parliamentary group's Deputy-Chairman Kamen Kostadinov said that there were no internal debates within DPS about Peevski's nomination and that he was BSP and the Prime Minister's choice. DPS was backing him as a longtime colleague, although not a party member.

Following protests against Peevski's appointment, DPS announced that they had made a political mistake, not having considered the public outcry.

2.1.4. "Ataka"

Election results turned the nationalists of "Ataka" into a party which will directly impact the stability of the new parliamentary majority. "Ataka" is represented by 23 MPs in the National Assembly. Party leader Volen Siderov became Chairman of the parliamentary group. His deputies are Desislav Chukolov, Pavel Shopov and Stanislav Stanilov.

"Ataka" is in a difficult position - on the one hand, the party took a course of strong criticism and opposition towards GERB, who had ruled until recently. On the other hand, Siderov's nationalists offer "unofficial" support to the BSP and DPS government. Siderov himself provided the necessary one vote to form a quorum when Oresharski's cabinet was voted on.

A major challenge for the party is how to explain to their constituents the support they provide to a government with DPS participation. All throughout "Ataka's" existence, DPS has been its ideological and political opponent.

This led to a situation where "Ataka" is seeking ways to explain its new role. The party's leader said he would not support a

GERB government, but would also not give his vote to Oresharski. In his address at the state opening of the 42nd National Assembly, Siderov identified the party's key priorities as being implementing changes to the Energy Law, the fight against corruption and the expulsion of foreign monopolies. Siderov's populist rhetoric stood out once again. He proposed an increase of the minimum wage to 1000 BGN and of the minimum pension to 500 BGN – ideas which are untenable, given the economic reality in the country.

Siderov portrayed himself as a constant corrective to the government and promised to monitor whether each MP was looking after the people's interests.

The state opening of the 42nd National Assembly was accompanied by outrageous behavior of "Ataka" MPs. The nationalists refused to stand up and honor the EU anthem, while in his speech Siderov directed rude words at the ambassadors of several European countries present at the official ceremony. The scandalous behavior of the leader of "Ataka" continued after the session, when he verbally attacked a journalist working for the TV network of his strongest competition for the nationalist vote – Valeri Simeonov, leader of the National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria.

Siderov's outrageous behavior showed also during the session of the Consultative National Security Council convened by the President, where he directed some very strong insults at the President, and leader of GERB Boyko Borisov. The situation came to a point where the President had to suspend the meeting for 15 minutes to cool down passions.

Despite his provocative and scandalous behavior, Volen Siderov was given the Chairmanship over the Anti-Corruption and Parliamentary Ethics Committee in the 42nd National Assembly with the help of BSP and DPS votes.

Volen Siderov's position on the protests following Peevski's nomination was clear – according to him the protests were politically organized, while the main culprits behind them were to be found among the ranks of GERB supporters and people close to Ivan Kostov and Meglena Kuneva.

As a whole, leader of "Ataka" Volen Siderov had to justify his actions following the elections, since there were constant suspicions of backroom deals with BSP and DPS. Siderov emphatically denied GERB's allegations of a new three-party coalition.

As a consequence of the current circumstances surrounding "Ataka", tensions within the party are on the rise. Many of its regional structures in the country demanded Siderov's resignation.

3. Public Opinion

Peevski's nomination as head of SANS exacerbated public discontent. This has lasting negative consequences for the government and the majority that formed it. An Alpha Research survey shows that 85% of people support the protests against Delyan Peevski's nomination as head of SANS, while 71% supported those against the appointed governors in Plovdiv and Blagoevgrad.

There is a division of opinion when it comes to the resignation of Oresharski's government, though: 50% of respondents support the idea of the cabinet stepping down, 43%, however, do not.

39% of citizens believe that the government's actions so far are principled and to the benefit of society, while 53% believe that they are in the interest of certain economic circles.

As a result of the Peevski scandal, parliamentary parties are quickly losing their supporters' trust. The most negative attitudes are directed at BSP and "Ataka." 32% of BSP supporters and 40% of those of "Ataka" are dis-

appointed by their party's actions. Although to a lesser extent, a decline in confidence is also evident among GERB constituents – an additional 16%, on top of those already lost at the elections, no longer show confidence in the party.

The only politician to have gained trust among citizens is President Rosen Plevneliev. His ratings have increased by 12% - from 32% in March to 44% in June. Leaders of the parliamentary parties struggle with relatively low confidence rates. Boyko Borisov has a 25% rating, followed by Sergey Stanishev (21%), Lyutvi Mestan (9%) and Volen Siderov (5%).

Bulgarian EU Commissioner Kristalina Georgieva enjoys traditionally high confidence rates: 61% positive ratings and 10% negative ones.

Attitudes towards the judiciary remain within already familiar levels of about 10-12% confidence and 45-48% distrust. Attorney General Sotir Tsatsarov, however, enjoys three times higher confidence rates than the institution he is presiding over. An Alpha Research survey shows that for the first time a representative of this office elicits more confidence than distrust. 31% of respondents evaluated his work positively, 24% negatively, while 45% had no opinion on the matter.

The Alpha Research study also evaluates opinions on the government program announced by Oresharski. Social measures within the program enjoy the highest approval rates. About 80% support and expect increases in child care benefits and aid to the needy, inflation indexation of pension payments, reform in the energy sector and regulation of electricity prices. Measures aimed at supporting SMEs show a 50% approval rate among respondents.

When it comes to the current government's future, forecasts are rather bleak. Only

18% believe that the government will serve out its full term, 20% say it will remain in power for a year, while the prediction of 37% of respondents is only a couple of months.

4. Main Conclusions and Forecasts

1. Recent events in the country show that Bulgaria is in a political crisis. Oresharski's government started out with the lowest confidence rates of the entire period since democratic changes in the country. Elections registered the lowest voting turnout, while close to 25% of voters have no parliamentary representation, as smaller political parties that they gave their support to failed to pass the electoral threshold.

The new wave of protests triggered by Delyan Peevski's appointment as head of SANS only increase political tensions and the country is heading towards an even deeper political crisis. Suspicions of backroom deals in the forming of the new government led to an even bigger drop in the already low confidence levels.

A potential government resignation and new early elections would only further deepen the political and economic crisis. The country needs a working parliament and government to implement important and urgent reforms, aimed at revitalizing the economy and limiting the social impact of the crisis. Unemployment, lack of investments and the nation's unity are the main risks facing the country and could lead to grave social and political consequences. At present, relations between government and opposition are highly confrontational and further hamper the implementation of urgent reforms.

2. GERB won the elections but fell into isolation thereafter. The party refused to recognize the election results and appealed against them before the Constitutional Court, but the petition for the invalidation of the elections was rejected. Despite Boyko Borisov's assur-

ances that his party would be a constructive opposition, GERB MPs have been boycotting Parliament's work ever since its first hours in office within the 42nd National Assembly. The highly confrontational tone and behavior of the rest of the parliamentary parties contributes even more to this. From an inner-party perspective, GERB certainly has reasons to seek new elections, reckoning on certain gains as a result of the turmoil caused by Delyan Peevski's failed appointment.

On the other hand, GERB is facing the challenge of dealing with growing internal tensions which could lead to a split within the party itself. A number of local structures demand Tsvetan Tsvetanov and Iskra Fidossova's resignation, accusing them of imposing an authoritarian and destructive style of work.

For the first time since the formation of the party Tsvetan Tsvetanov finds himself in a defensive position. Charges brought against him by the prosecution for illegal wiretapping are putting his political future to the test. For now, Borisov does not wish to distance himself from Tsvetanov, but should tensions within the party continue, he might do so to preserve its unity.

3. BSP accepted the mandate to form a new government, thus burdening itself with the tremendous responsibility of supporting a minority government in rather difficult and volatile socio-political circumstances. The "Peevski" scandal and subsequent protests have a very negative impact on the party's credibility and that of its leader Stanishev. Tensions within the party itself are growing, while its members and supporters have good cause to be hesitant. Interparty opposition demanded that Stanishev step down. He has secured the National Council's confidence for now, but should the government resign, leading to early elections, his leadership position would certainly be jeopardized. BSP will most likely be the biggest loser in a scenario of possible early elections.

4. DPS gained a sure footing within Orsharski's government with representatives not only among ministers, but also deputy-ministers and governors. The appointment of Delyan Peevski, a DPS MP, as head of SANS further intensified negative attitudes towards the party. Once again strong anti-DPS rhetoric has come to the forefront. Tension in certain areas of the country, such as Plovdiv and Blagoevgrad, where citizens opposed the appointment of DPS members as regional governors, further contributes to this.

5. Orsharski's government was only possible with the "unofficial" support of "Ataka". A major problem for the party is how to explain to its voters the backing of a government with DPS participation. Let us not forget that this is the party "Ataka" has traditionally criticized ever since its establishment. The party leader's behavior increased dissatisfaction with him and several party structures have

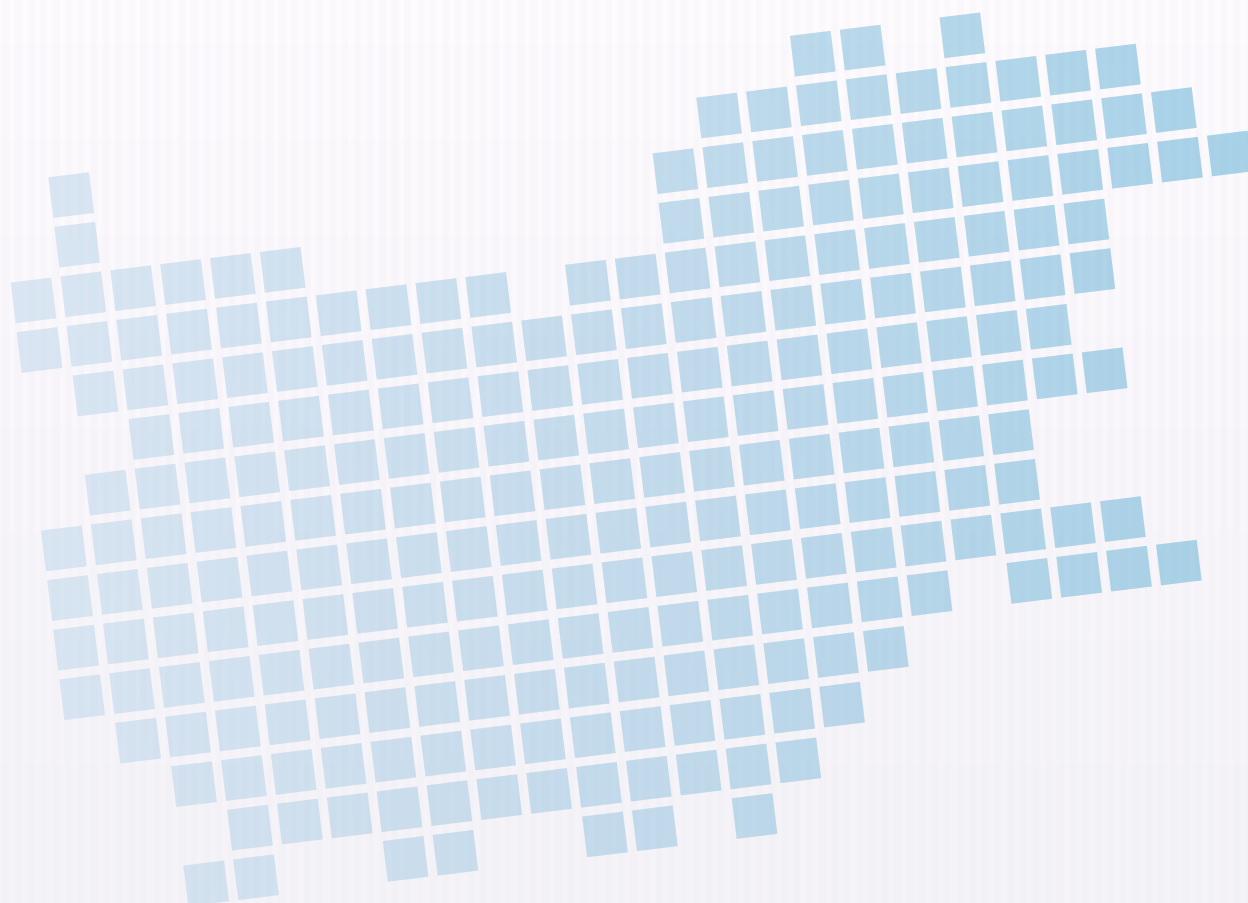
already demanded his resignation. The major competitor of "Ataka" for the nationalist vote is Valeri Simeonov's National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria. The party needed very little to pass the 4% threshold and in the event of new early elections looks like the most likely political entity to attract disillusioned nationalists, disappointed with Siderov.

6. The extra-parliamentary opposition, mainly parties from the traditional Right which failed to enter parliament, are making efforts to unite. Democrats for a Strong Bulgaria, the Bulgaria for Citizens Movement and some other smaller parties from the political Right are striving to form a new right-wing coalition. They support calls for the government's resignation and hope to enter parliament at potential new early elections. At the same time, differences among them are significant and finding unity will be difficult to achieve.

About the editor:

Professor, Doctor of Philosophy, George Karasimeonov teaches at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Director of the Institute for Political and Legal Studies and editor of "Political Research." From 1991 to 1998 Chairman of the Bulgarian Political Science Association.

Contact: ipls@dir.bg



Imprint

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

Orders

e-mail: office@fes.bg

Commercial use of all media published by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) is not permitted without the written consent of the FES.

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.