

Georgi Karasimeonov (Ed.)

BAR METER

Bulgaria's Political Parties

Year 16, Issue 4, October - December 2016

- The resignation of the government placed the country before a new political situation. The challenges facing Bulgaria after Erdogan's threats towards Europe of allowing the influx of migrants become ever more realistic. The possibility for the country to be left without a legitimately elected government and working parliament after January 22nd 2017 highlights the risks that the country is facing. The result of the presidential elections, which were won by Rumen Radev, outlined a new political situation. GERB and BSP declined to form a government in this parliament. Eventually the third parliamentary group, the Reformist Bloc, invited by the president will also fail to form a government. This means that the country will face preterm elections in the next months. It is evident that we are witnessing a relocation of the main players from the political system, which most probably will undergo restructuring during the forthcoming early parliamentary elections.
- GERB recorded its first heavy election defeat since the dawn of its formation as a party. This shows that there is tiredness within the party and weariness from its long-standing governance of the country. So far, the party has mainly depended on the charisma of its leader but it is already obvious that even this asset has now been exhausted. The loss can be seen as an opportunity for GERB to reevaluate its policies and its public image, and to "freshen up" the party.
- BSP achieved an important election victory. This could be seen as the beginning of an upsurge of the party and guarantee for changes, demanded by its new leadership, headed by Kornelia Ninova. The main challenge for BSP, as the most numerous left party in the country, commanding the greatest authority, is whether it will be able to find ways to connect with other left formations in order to consolidate the left-wing political spectrum.

**FRIEDRICH
EBERT 
STIFTUNG**

Office Bulgaria
Analyses



CONTENTS

1. Political Situation	2
1.1. Domestic policy.....	2
1.2 Foreign and European policy	4
1.3. Migrant crisis	4
2. State and development of the main political parties	6
2.1. Trends in the parliamentary represented parties supporting the government	6
2.1.1. GERB	6
2.1.2. Reformist Bloc.....	7
2.1.3. Patriotic Front	8
2.2. Trends in the parliamentary opposition	9
2.2.1. BSP-Left Bulgaria.....	9
2.2.2. MRF.....	10
2.2.3. BDC.....	11
2.2.4. "Ataka"	12
2.2.5. ABV.....	12
2.3. Positions of the parties on foreign and European policy.....	13
3. Public opinion.....	14
4. Main Conclusions and forecasts.....	14

1. Political Situation

1.1 Domestic Policy

The political situation was marked with the sign of the presidential elections that were held. Actually, the election campaign was much delayed, as a result of the fact that GERB announced its candidate for president – the Chair of the National Assembly Tsetska Tsacheva, only a few days before the official start of the campaign. The candidates of the two leading parties GERB and BSP – Tsetska Tsacheva and Rumen Radev, respectively, were seen as favorites from the very start of the campaign. The public opinion polls conducted at the start of the campaign gave precedence to Tsacheva but with the approach of election day, the difference between the two candidates disappeared. However, none of the agencies made a forecast that Radev would have a higher result than Tsacheva during the first round of elections. We can find the reasons for this in the election campaign itself. The two main contestants for the presidency held two televised debates – the first was before the first round of the elections and the second – a week before the runoff. Analysts believe that Rumen Radev was more convincing during both debates.

As a whole GERB's campaign can be evaluated as unsuccessful. The late announcement of their candidate and the lack of charisma in Tsacheva had an effect on the end result. Tsacheva took a chance with a positive campaign by placing the emphasis on GERB's achievements in governance. She pledged that if elected president she would lead a predictable foreign policy and would follow openly the Euro-Atlantic course of action of the country. Prime Minister Boyko Borisov and the Deputy Leader of the party Tsvetan Tsvetanov played an active role in the campaign.

Convinced of victory during the runoff,

the Prime Minister Borisov declared that if Tsacheva was second during the first round of elections, he would resign immediately. Consequently, a number of analysts saw this act on the part of Borisov as his mistake in transforming the presidential elections into a vote of confidence for the government he headed.

Unlike Tsacheva, Rumen Radev focused his messages towards a wider spectrum of voters. Throughout his entire campaign, he declared that he would address not only the sympathisers of BSP and the left-wing but all Bulgarian people. Radev stated that he was not looking for partisan support but for support from Bulgarians. The patriotic theme was at the focus of his campaign – the protection of national interest and the sovereignty of Bulgaria. According to him Bulgaria needs an independent position on internal-political and foreign policy issues and not on decisions being imposed from abroad. One of the topics on which Radev focused and because of which he was attacked by the right-wing formations, was his position on the sanctions against Russia. During the campaign Radev commented several times that the sanctions should be reviewed because they are harmful for Europe as a whole and for Bulgaria in particular. According to him we have lost a great deal from economic point of view as a result of the sanctions. However, he called upon finding a pan-European decision and consensus not only for lifting the sanctions but also for finding a permanent solution to the conflict in Eastern Ukraine.

Another issue which caused controversy was Radev's position regarding the annexation of Crimea. He said that the fact of infringement of international law is clear for everyone to see, but the facts and the reality show that at the moment "the Rus-

sian flag flies over Crimea.” These views expressed by him resulted in the opponents of his campaign declaring him a “pro-Russian candidate”, something which Tsetska Tsacheva also tried to point out during their two debates.

The other candidates relied on various strategies. Krasimir Karakachanov placed emphasis mainly on the migrant crisis and the danger for the state border. He insisted on the relocation of the migrants in sealed-off refugee centers located near the borders, the immediate extradition of economic immigrants, as well as undertaking measures on behalf of the state against human trafficking.

The candidate of the Reformist Bloc Traicho Traikov focused his campaign around the claim that he was the sole presidential nominee who was fighting the status quo. He criticized Radev regarding his foreign policy messages and Tsetska Tsacheva who, if elected president, would uncomplainingly obey the Prime Minister and Leader of GERB, Boyko Borisov.

The businessman Veselin Mareshki, one of the surprises during these elections, directed his campaign towards the people who loathe politicians and thus managed to attract the protest vote. Mareshki, who owes a chain of drugstores selling cheaper medicines and filling stations selling cheaper fuel, criticized the cartel in the fuel sector – something which he promised to focus on if elected president.

As expected, the presidential elections were held in two rounds. Rumen Radev and Iliana Yotova won the first round of elections with 25.44% of the votes, equaling 973,511 ballots. Tsetska Tsacheva and Plamen Manoushev came second with 21.96% of the votes or 840,525 ballots. Third came the presidential tandem of

Krasimir Karakachanov and Yavor Notev with 14.9% (572,963 ballots). In fourth place was Veselin Mareshki with 11.17% (427,660 ballots). The fifth candidate was the presidential tandem Plamen Oresharski and Danail Papazov with 6.63% (253,726 ballots). The candidates of the Reformist Bloc – Traicho Traikov and Sabi Sabev came sixth with 5.87% (224,637 ballots). The candidates of ABV Ivaylo Kalfin and Lyubomir Halachev won 3.28% and the candidates of Movement 21 and NDSV – Tatiana Doncheva and Mincho Spasov won 1.81%.

The national referendum, initiated by the showman Slavi Trifonov, was held on November 6th simultaneously with the first round of the presidential elections. All three questions – for the introduction of a majority election system in two rounds, for the reduction of the state subsidy for political parties to BGN 1 and for the introduction of mandatory voting, received the majority support of the people. Nonetheless, the referendum came some 12 thousand votes short of becoming mandatory for parliament. Now the referendum questions have to be referred to the National Assembly, which will have the final word.

The second round of the presidential elections, held on November 13th was won convincingly by Rumen Radev with a little over 59% of the votes. More than 2 million people voted for him. Tsacheva came second with almost 800,000 votes less than the winner or 36% of the valid votes. 4.4% were the cast “do not support anyone” votes.

At the press conference after the elections, the president-elect Rumen Radev said that this is the beginning of the most important mission of his life – to work for a safe, prosperous and peaceful Bulgaria. He declared that he will “rely on succession

though dialogue with the Bulgarian people, will be guided by law, and will observe human rights.”

Radev who won the sympathies of the left-wing supporters with his pledge to warm up the relations with Russia, was cautious while commenting on his foreign policy course of action. According to him, the policy “related to the sanctions against Russia is the task of the government, but this does not mean that the president, who represents the state, cannot show an active position and seek dialogue on this topic with his colleagues from Europe and Russia.” There are different voices within Europe. However, he declared that he would work in close cooperation with the government and our EU partners on this issue.

Radev declared that this election victory is a win for Bulgaria. According to him, the people have managed to overcome their apathy and fear. He said that “despite the bluffing of the incumbents for an apocalypse, the people have voted in favour of change.” According to him, the vote shows the negative evaluation for the incumbents and that Bulgaria is faced with a new political situation.

Tsacheva admitted the defeat, while the Prime Minister Borisov said that he would resign as a result of the defeat. The resignation of the government was approved by the National Assembly and now the country is on the threshold of early parliamentary elections. The two largest parliamentary represented parties, GERB and BSP, said that they will return the mandate from the president for the formation of a new government within this parliament, as the Constitution stipulates, immediately and they fulfilled their pledge. Eventually the third parliamentary group, the Reformist Block, invited by the president, will also fail to

form a government. In that case there will be early parliamentary elections and the appointment of a new caretaker government by the current president. According to the Constitution of the country during the last three months of the mandate the president he does not have the right to dissolve parliament and appoint the date for new elections. This will have to be done by the president-elect Radev after assuming office on January 21st. This means that the elections, if any, will most probably be held at the end of March 2017.

1.2 Foreign and European Policy

The Bulgarian government decided to support the signing of the agreement between the European Union and Canada – CETA, provided there are “irrevocable guarantees on behalf of the Canadian government for a visa waiver for all Bulgarian citizens.”

The government underlined that “this approach alone would allow Bulgaria to take equal advantage from the concluded arrangement, and that Bulgarian economic entities would be competitive with respect to the other Member States and Canada.”

President-elect Rumen Radev said that after assuming office he will approach the Constitutional Court on the CETA agreement, as he believes that it is unconstitutional.

1.3. Migrant Crisis

At the end of November there were clashes between migrants resident in the refugee centre in Harmanli and the police. This occurred as a result of the health officials’ decision to seal off the centre and to place it under quarantine, forbidding the migrants to leave its premises, due to the several registered cases of scabies. Figures from the Refugee Agency show that

there are 2,700 people accommodated at the Harmanli centre. After the riots the Harmanli centre was ravaged and material damage was incurred. There were even attacks against the law enforcement bodies. The police used water guns and rubber bullets. More than 400 migrants were apprehended for vandalism. More than 20 policemen were injured. All those involved in acts of vandalism in the Harmanli refugee camp will be indicted by the prosecution.

The outgoing Prime Minister Boyko Borisov was at the site during the night of the riots. He made a warning by saying that we should be aware of the calls for taking the law into the hands of the public, because this could lead to the escalation of tension. Borisov called upon the people to be very careful what they upload on social media, as this might provoke counteractions from terrorist groups.

The disturbances in the Harmanli camp were mainly caused by Afghan refugees. The head of the Bulgarian Refugees Agency, Petya Pavlova, made a connection between the migrant's protest in the country and abroad. According to her when there were "fires in Calais, an incident occurred in Harmanli too; when there was an incident in Germany, another one occurred in the country. Yesterday there was tension on the Isle of Lesbos, today we have tension here. Obviously, these riots are interconnected." Prime Minister Borisov also admitted that it is possible for the riot to have been organized from abroad in order to attract attention to the migrant issue and thus to exert pressure on politicians in Europe.

Borisov stated that the extradition of the Afghan refugees will commence in December. Later Prime Minister Borisov stated that the main perpetrator of the riot in Harmanli

refugee camp has been ascertained. He has been in Bulgaria for the past four months. Before that he resided in Germany, where he was sentenced for drug distribution to one-and-a-half years' imprisonment and expelled. Borisov refused to provide more information and even declined to name the nationality of the perpetrator, only stating that he is not Syrian.

Further, the Prime Minister said that the relocation of approximately 1000 refugees from the Harmanli camp to ex-army barracks, located near the border, will be organised soon. They will be separated into groups of 50 up to 100 persons. According to him the Harmanli camp will no longer exist in its present form but will become a centre for accommodating families with children. The outgoing Prime Minister also said that the migrants are now viewed as representatives of two groups. The first waits quietly and peacefully for a decision for protection under European directives. The other group includes the migrants that do not abide by the law and to do respond to Bulgarian tolerance.

The events in Harmanli resulted in political comments from the main political parties. BSP Leader Kornelia Ninova pointed out that GERB is most to blame for what is happening in Harmanli and said that the left is not responsible for their mistakes. According to her, it is necessary to undertake urgent measures, such as immediate deportation of the economic migrants, the deployment of the army at the border and draconian measures against illegal crossing and expedient completion of the construction of the fence. Ninova expressed support for the revision of the Dublin Regulation.

The VMRO Leader Krasimir Karachanov said that he is in favor of the "establishment of sealed-off specialized

centers, mandatorily located near the border, outside urban territories, which provide short-term detention until the extradition of the individuals.” According to him the incident in Harmanli serves to prove the unpreparedness of this type of centers to deal with events where there is a display of mass aggression. The Patriotic Front insists that the Council of Ministers strengthen the security of the state border and the centers for the accommodating of migrants and to order that force be used if necessary to cope with mass disturbances.

According to the DSB Leader Radan Kanev, the incident in Harmanli is a result of the “cascade of failures on behalf of the Bulgarian authorities which has led to breach in national security.” He underlined that there is an increase of human trafficking at the border and there are no cases of trials and sentencing of traffickers, which means that there is a breach in the Ministry of Interior. Kanev described putting together in the same camp Afghan and Syrian refugees as insanity, and added that there is a readmission agreement between Bulgaria and Afghanistan in force for the past two months but not a single Afghan citizen has been repatriated under the force of this agreement. According to him, the transformation of the centre from an open to a sealed-off one should have been conducted as a carefully planned police operation and not a spontaneous populist move.

2. State and Development of the Main Political Parties

2.1. Trends in the Parliamentary Represented Parties Supporting the Government

2.1.1. GERB

GERB admitted with difficulty its election defeat. This is the first defeat of the party

at national level, since its first emergence in the 2007 elections. The party did not conduct an extensive canvassing of the public opinion in the country just before the presidential campaign. The late announcement of their presidential candidate tandem – just a few days before the official start of the election campaign, the mistakes committed during the campaign itself, as well as other reckless decisions by the government, such as the last-minute change of the Bulgarian UN Secretary General candidacy, led to the accumulation of negative attitude among a wide range of voters. The nomination of Tsetska Tsacheva can also be regarded as a mistake, something which even the Prime Minister Borisov mentioned between the two rounds of elections. Tsacheva is among the politicians from GERB with a relatively low approval rate, at the same time the National Assembly, chaired by her, enjoys the approval of only 9% of the Bulgarian people. The other candidates – the Mayor of Sofia, Yordanka Fandakova, and the Mayor of Burgas, Dimitar Nikolov, and the Deputy Prime Minister, Tomislav Donchev, enjoy a much higher public approval. The Prime Minister and Leader of GERB Boyko Borisov revealed that they were not nominated because he didn’t want to disturb the work of the authorities they headed.

A heavy blow for GERB was also the fact that the party lost the elections in the large cities in the country, where traditionally it had strong supremacy in the past. Even in Sofia and Plovdiv, where the right-wing parties always received the strongest support, Tsetska Tsacheva was in second place after Rumen Radev both during the first round and the runoff.

The Prime Minister and Leader of GERB Boyko Borisov said that the loss of “GERB is categorical, and clear; lessons should be

drawn from it." According to him, "people told us at these elections – something is not right. Perhaps our priorities are good, but clearly there are others which are even better. All the while I have believed that we give visible things each day – highways, railway lines, theatres, renovated schools and apartment blocks and all manner of things, agricultural subsidies. We have underestimated something, we did not comprehend something and now the people are giving us a hint."

Still another blow for GERB was the loss of the local by-elections in Mladost District in Sofia - one of the most populated quarters in the capital. The local by-elections for regional mayor were held after the incumbent mayor resigned, following scandals and citizens' protests against the overbuilding in the quarter. GERB's candidate lost the runoff to the independent candidate Desislava Ivancheva.

In the following months GERB will focus on the analysis of the loss. Most probably a number of personnel reshuffles within the party's structure will be conducted. At least, at this point in time any changes in the central leadership of the party are not expected, but the possibility of such reshuffles at the time of potential early general elections cannot be dismissed.

GERB's defeat is also a heavy loss for the Deputy Leader of the party and the Chairman of the Parliamentary Group, Tsvetan Tsvetanov, as a long-standing head of the party's election headquarters. Similarly, Tsvetanov reiterated that GERB will draw lessons from the loss and will come out stronger than ever at the next elections.

2.1.2. Reformist Bloc /RB/

The presidential elections were the last ones in which the Reformist Bloc took part in its current format. The long-awaited split in the bloc is a fact after DSB, headed by Radan Kanev, declared that in the future it will act separately and will work for a new political project.

The RB's presidential candidate tandem Traicho Traikov – Sabi Sabev received slightly more than 5.8% votes, equal to 220,000 ballots. Although this result overlaps the result of the Reformist Bloc from the last parliamentary elections, their candidates ranked in sixth place.

As a whole, the Reformist Bloc leaders gave a positive evaluation of the result achieved by Traicho Traikov. At the same time, however the tension within the bloc, which escalated extremely after Radan Kanev and DSB went into opposition at the end of last year, resulted in its long-anticipated conclusion.

The parties within the Reformist Bloc, excluding DSB, signed a new coalition agreement, expressing their will to continue forward together. DSB were also invited, but they declined the invitation at this point in time.

The Leader of BCM Meglena Kouneva explained that the agreement will remain open for a period of three months and other willing parties are welcomed to join it. At the end of this period a comprehensive project for a new coalition agreement between the parties from the Reformist Bloc will be drafted and a roadmap for the strategic and organizational development of the RB will be prepared.

On his behalf, DSB's Leader Radan Kanev said that the Reformist Bloc has simply run out of ideas. In his words, the Reformist Bloc has demonstrated that it can only "desig-

nate Boyko Borisov for boss and become his most loyal contract killer." Kanev predicted that we should prepare for protests against a series of corrupted administrations that betrayed the confidence of the Bulgarian people. He added that we are faced with a hard and extremely unfair battle for the preservation of the modern development of Bulgaria, of Bulgarian patriotism and the very foundations of free market economy.

The BCM Leader Meglena Kouneva stated that the introduction of 100% majority voting is extremely dangerous. According to her, the political parties underestimated this issue, although during the campaign they had to warn the people of the dangers that this type of an election system hides. According to Kouneva the most suitable version would be the proportional representation system with preference without minimum threshold, which would be "fair and just" and this way the people would be able to vote for individuals. The MP from BCM Dimitar Delchev supported Kouneva's arguments by stating that if a two-round majority election system were to be introduced, parliament would be filled with oligarchs, we would be faced with the "bipolar political model or 2 to 3 large parties represented in parliament which would not be representative for all the voters."

The co-chair of the parliamentary party of the RB, Naiden Zelenogorski, underlined that lately the "nationalist-populists" are prevailing and they have to be counteracted by "reasonable politics that uphold not partisan and election interests but national ones and foremost, the safety of the state."

At the end of November DSB held its national conference in Veliko Tarnovo, during which the party leader, Radan Kanev, hinted on a new political model. According to him, the country needs a "covenant for

a new Bulgarian republic", which would unite the free people. In his words, we need a radical change of the political model, and of the oligarchic and behind the scene governance. According to him, this can be achieved with courage and not "with Kouneva's and Lukarski's Reformist Bloc and Borisov's and Tsvetanov's GERB." These goals require a new political alliance – "a union between all Bulgarians who want change and not party coalition", "union around values and not compromises." Kanev believes that this new charter can forge the beginning of a new period of development of the Bulgarian republic that would put an end to the "70 years of totalitarian republic and façade of democracy."

The charter which Kanev presented to the delegates at the conference highlighted seven causes. The leading idea is for economic development and prosperity of the people who should be placed above the privileged political class and the rampant oligarchy, while taxes should remain where they have been formed. He underlined that the cardinal political task should be the establishment of independent anticorruption state prosecution and the consolidation of a strong Bulgarian armed force within NATO, powerful security services and strong diplomacy. Nature preservation in the interest of local communities and the renaissance of the Bulgarian spirit, related to the revival of cultural and sports traditions, are also part of the proposals included in the charter, which has to unite the supporters of the right-wing and centre political spectrum.

2.1.3. Patriotic Front

The candidates for president and vice president of the United Patriots – NFSB, "Ataka" and VMRO – Krasimir Karakachanov and Yavor Notev, ranked in third

place at the presidential elections with a result close to 15% of the actual votes, equal to 573,000 ballots. In total, this result exceeds the vote for the Patriotic Front and "Ataka" at the last parliamentary elections.

This transformed the nationalists into the third political power, and now they are aiming for a high result at the forthcoming parliamentary elections. The leaders of NFSB, VMRO and "Ataka" expressed their categorical wish for this joint project to continue its work in the future, which, according to them, will increase their chances for satisfactory performance during the next elections and a repetition of their present result.

During the campaign, the United Patriots played around with the migrant crisis and the danger to national security, arising from the migrant influx, which, combined with the heightened fears of the people, led to the high result for the patriots.

The NFSB Leader Valeri Simeonov expressed satisfaction from the result of the elections. He characterized this success as the "first great victory" which will lead to even greater representation in the future. The candidate for president Krasimir Karakachanov described the United Patriots as "one fist that will enforce the correct decision in Bulgarian politics." Karakachanov declared that this is a "war for the liberation of Bulgaria. We want to free the Bulgarian people from the yoke of MRF and several other Turkish political parties in Bulgaria. We want to free the people from the crimes committed by gypsies and the purchased voting."

Karakachanov explained that the United Patriots are the second political party in Ruse, Vratsa and Dolni Dubnik.

Karakachanov state that their campaign was successful because it was founded on

clear messages – such as the completion of the fence at the border with Turkey, stopping illegal migration in Bulgaria, non-admittance of permanent settlement of illegal migrants in Bulgaria, and increasing the minimum pension of Bulgarian citizens.

At the end of November, the Patriotic Front and "Ataka" submitted proposals for amendment of the State Budget Law and the Law on State Social Security between the first and second reading, for raising the minimum monthly pension to BGN 300 or BGN 200 and recalculation of all the pensions awarded in previous periods. According to the Deputy Chairman of the Parliamentary Group of the Patriotic Front, Iskren Veselinov, the two proposals aim to raise the income of the poorest pensioners. According to him, the cost for the budget for the two proposals has been estimated at BGN 800 million. Veselinov said that in the period 2008 – 2015 the average insurance income was raised by 82%, while pensions grew only by 25%. According to him, this meant that there is a significant lagging behind in the income of the elderly and more than 1.7 million pensions have to be updated. According to Veselinov, the recalculation would allow pensions to be raised by approximately 23%, which would guarantee a higher level of social protection with a minimum pension of BGN 200.

2.2. Trends in the Parliamentary Opposition

2.2.1. BSP – Left Bulgaria

The presidential elections were of major importance for BSP and its new leadership, headed by Kornelia Ninova. The convincing victory of Rumen Radev and Iliana Yotova is the first victory of BSP at national elections since 2005 when the party, led by Sergey Stanishev, won the elections and formed a

coalition government together with NDSV and MRF.

This gave a new impetus to BSP, after the heavy electoral defeats which it endured over the past 10 years during the domination of GERB in the governance of the country.

After the victory at the presidential elections, BSP Leader Kornelia Ninova declared that the party will conduct real measures for change aimed at transforming it into a modern leftwing party. Ninova stated that there will be a proposal made for convening the party's congress at the beginning of next year under the motto "Changing BSP". In her words, the success at the elections marks the beginning of the change but there is still much work to be done. She shared that BSP's main goal is to be a modern leftwing party. The BSP Leader said that she will propose to the Congress to approve a new pre-election platform with clear, concrete commitments, founded on authentic left values. Apart from this, a proposal for a new coalition will be proposed for the next parliamentary elections – different from the present "BSP Left Bulgaria" coalition including 13 parties, and the aim would be towards the reduction of the parties within the coalition. In her words, there will be an organisational change within the party "so that we can show that we can meet people's expectations for changes from within and to open the door of the party for young, capable people."

At the end of November, BSP held its National Council party meeting. At the forum, the Leader Kornelia Ninova announced the intentions to introduce a maximum term of two mandates for the party leader. Apart from this, Ninova proposed that the leader of BSP should be elected directly by the party members and not by the congress, as

is currently the case. There will be a mandate regime for the members of parliament too, for a maximum of three terms for MPs. In order for these proposals to come into effect, the congress has to amend the statute regulations of the party. BSP's plenum also made several personnel changes in the executive structures of the party. The resignations of Konstantin Paskalev and Yuri Aslanov were approved and they will no longer be members of BSP's Executive Bureau. Both deposited their resignations two months ago, when the party's leadership decided to support the candidacy of Gen. Rumen Radev for president. The plenum also dismissed Iliana Yotova from the party's leadership after she was elected Vice President of the Republic. The new members of the Executive Bureau are the MP Stoyan Mirchev, Ivan Chenchev and Viara Yordanova.

2.2.2. Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF)

After the nomination of the former Prime Minister Plamen Oresharski for candidate for president by an initiative committee, which was surprising for some, at the end of October he received the official support of MRF. According to MRF Leader Mustafa Karadayi, Plamen Oresharski fits the party's profile for this post – "the future president should be non-partisan, he should be able to embrace his mission, be a democrat and Euro-Atlantic by conviction, should possess the will to assert democratic attainments, and should work for the consolidation of the rule of law and the social state, and he should be sensitive towards human rights and freedoms." Apart from this, in Karadayi's words the "president has to be the unifier of the nation, to be president of all Bulgarian citizens, to work for the interna-

tional prestige of the country and to uphold our interests in NATO and the EU'.

At the press conference after the first round of the presidential elections, the MRF Leader Mustafa Karadayi declared that the Bulgarian voters have shown that they want change. According to him Bulgarian citizens showed support for independent candidates. In his words, the MRF's sympathizers want to see changes in Bulgaria because it is "not good to have concentration of power in all the institutions in the hands of a single party and, even more, in the hands of a single person." In this way indirectly MRF supported Rumen Radev during the second round of elections. Karadayi evaluated as positive MRF's campaign and its support for the independent candidate for president Plamen Oresharski.

After the election of Rumen Radev for President, MRF's deputy chairman Chetin Kazak stated that the Movement had contributed noticeably for his success. He remarked that during the first round of elections the movement supported the independent candidate Plamen Oresharski, while it called upon its voters to support Radev during the runoff. In his words the General received the "enormous" support of the MRF voters. According to him DOST in turn "hid behind the wide back of GERB." Regarding the voting in Turkey, where the holders of Bulgarian passports expressed support for the candidate of GERB Tsetska Tsacheva, Kazak said that "messages reach Turkey with difficulty," and as to the way regarding what the outcome will be if MRF and DOST take part in the elections, we will see soon.

In fact, the main stake for MRF during these elections was the battle with DOST. This was also the reason why the party supported Oresharski for candidate presi-

dent and by doing so wanted to show its electoral potential. DOST, headed by Lyutvi Mestan, behind whom are the Diaspora organizations in Turkey, and about which there are doubts that it has the support of the Turkish state, shows that it is in a position to compete with MRF, when it comes to the votes of the Bulgarian Diaspora in Turkey. With respect to the territory of the country, MRF showed its great advantage before DOST despite the not so convincing results in Northeast Bulgaria – one of the bastions of the movement.

During the first round of the presidential elections DOST, which supported the candidate of the ruling party GERB Tsetska Tsacheva, won approximately 250 votes more in the sections in Turkey compared to MRF. According to data from the Central Election Committee, some 7220 people voted for Tsacheva and some 6942 people cast their vote for the candidate supported by MRF, Plamen Oresharski.

During the second round of elections, DOST won more votes than MRF in Turkey. The votes for Tsetska Tsacheva were 21,658 whilst for Rumen Radev the number was 14,092. Tsacheva won in Izmir, where her results in all six sections were a total of 5600, compared to 1941 votes for Radev, in Istanbul - 4355 votes compared to 2921 votes, in Bursa – with 5113 compared to 2605 and in Ankara - 669 compared to 221 votes. Radev won in Çorlu – a suburb of Istanbul where in both sections a total 2858 people voted for him and only 973 for Tsacheva and in the Ergene section – with only 47 votes more.

2.2.3. Bulgarian Democratic Centre (BDC)

During this quarter too, the parliamentary group of the Bulgarian Democratic Centre continued to be comprised of two

entities – the People’s Union with Leader Rumen Yonchev and the Bulgarian Democratic Centre party with Leader Krasimira Kovachka. At the beginning of October, the Bulgarian Democratic Centre united with other smaller formations in the United Democratic Centre coalition. The coalition also includes the Bulgarian Social-democratic Party and the Radical-democratic Party. The new democratic formation stated that they were ready to support a candidate president with a right-centre profile at the elections.

In turn, the People’s Union backed Krasimir Karakachanov and Yavor Notev for the presidential elections. The Leader of the People’s Union, Rumen Yonchev, stated that the candidacy of Karakachanov and Notev will unite the centrist and patriotic vote. Yonchev noted also that this support is given with the clear notion of looking for a long-term, stable alliance of the patriotic centre in Bulgarian politics that will have future prominence and will “put an end once and for all to the controversy and struggle between the left and the right.”

Regarding the issue of the early parliamentary elections, the BDC have some misgivings. According to them, the National Assembly has to continue its work and to appoint an expert government of their choice. The reasons for this position are provoked by the challenges that the country faces with a view to the preparation for the presidency of the Council of the European Union and the situation with the migrants in close vicinity to our borders.

2.2.4. “Ataka”

In the future “Ataka” will be viewed as part of the new patriotic bloc – the United Patriots. As mentioned previously the presidential nominee tandem Krasimir Kar-

akachanov and Yavor Notev from “Ataka” achieved surprisingly high results. It is very likely that “Ataka”, Valeri Simeonov’s NFSB and Krasimir Karakachanov’s VMRO will participate in the same form in the next parliamentary elections. During this quarter Volen Siderov mentioned several times in the media that both he and Valeri Simeonov have overcome their personal differences and have resolved their conflict, dating from a few years back. In Siderov’s words, this came to be in the name of unifying the patriotic organizations in Bulgaria, which is in the interest of the country, because a strong patriotic representation in the Bulgarian parliament is a guarantee for the protection of national interests. During this quarter Siderov’s evermore moderate rhetoric continues to impress. The scandals and radical theses unusual for him, often asserted boisterously from the parliamentary tribune or at party events, were absent. But at the same time the party’s populism, which is its main characteristic feature, still remains. The anti-EU speech with the calls for leaving NATO as well as the pro-Russian rhetoric have been toned down. It would seem that the new union has contributed to this, because Valeri Simeonov and Krasimir Karakachanov both uphold the Euro-Atlantic orientation of the country.

2.2.5. ABV

ABV’s presidential nominee Ivailo Kalfin, received 3.7% of the actual vote in the elections. This result disappointed ABV’s supporters, because it showed that the party is incapable of attracting new voters at this stage. Although Ivailo Kalfin is one of the most honoured Bulgarian politicians, commanding respect, with experience and well-reputed abroad, this was not enough to have a better result. It is obvious that BSP

managed to mobilise the left voters and remains the leading force in the left-wing spectrum. ABV's success during the 2014 parliamentary elections seems to be a short-term phenomenon which occurred after the fall of Oresharski's cabinet. After Prime Minister Borisov's resignation, ABV stated that they support the idea for an early vote, because in their view this government is spent on ideas, policy and personality. According to ABV's Leader Georgi Parvanov, the early vote will not create instability, on the contrary, it will lead to the rejuvenation of the state governance. Parvanov confirmed ABV's desire to continue to work in the format of seven parties, which supported Ivailo Kalfin's nomination, in future elections with the idea of further expanding this formation. Parvanov stated that their presidential nominee couple was "the best one competing in the election race." Parvanov described the result of their candidate as unsatisfactory. The party had reason to hope for a better result. He pointed out that they made a modern, stylish campaign, based on ideas, unlike some of their opponents. In his words, "the forceful actions, the pressure and the instilling of fear on the part of the ruling party in a number of regions" has left a bad impression.

Ivailo Kalfin evaluated the result he accomplished as unsatisfactory. Even in terms of a purely party vote, according to him, ABV has managed to increase its result compared to the last parliamentary elections.

After the first round of the elections, Georgi Parvanov and ABV did not explicitly give their support for BSP's candidate Rumen Radev. Parvanov stated that he did not see how he could vote for a candidate coming from GERB. Ivailo Kalfin, on the other hand, stated that consultations would be made within the party in order to determine

who to support in the runoff. Kalfin pointed out that within the party there were reasons for reserves towards both TsetskaTsacheva and Gen. Rumen Radev. This position shows that the relations between BSP and ABV continue to be strained and complex. ABV continues to feel offended by the fact that a few months ago the two parties failed to unite around the candidacy of Rumen Radev, after holding such intensive talks.

2.3. Positions of the Parties on Foreign and European policy

The free trade agreement between the EU and Canada – CETA led to a strong dispute between the major political parties in the country. BSP opposed the cabinet's decision and asked for the drafting of a report on the expected effects for Bulgaria, as well as the Bulgarian position to be voted in the plenary hall. MRF, the Patriotic Front and "Ataka" also supported the drafting of an analysis, but their votes were not enough, and their proposal was rejected by the National Assembly.

BSP Leader Kornelia Ninova stated that the visa waiver is a very "small award for such national treason". In her words, if the agreement is to be signed, it will "kill Bulgaria's economy, it will kill Bulgaria's agriculture, it will infringe upon national sovereignty, it will affect the resolution of labour disputes." According to her the Bulgarians travelling to Canada account for less than half of a percentage point of all international travels Bulgarians abroad, and the trade between Bulgaria and Canada is one tenth of a percentage point of our total export. "Ataka" also objected to the agreement with Canada, because, according to them, it will kill democracy and the sovereignty of Bulgaria and lead to the creation of a

parallel legal system. The Patriotic Front expressed a similar position.

The chairperson of the Parliamentary Foreign Policy Committee, Djema Grozdanova from GERB, stated that the negotiations for this agreement concluded in September 2014. In her words, the Bulgarian position is that it will not sign the agreement until the visa waiver with Canada for all Bulgarian citizens comes about in 2017. Boris Stanimirov from RB stated that Bulgaria should not sign the agreement until there is a written commitment for the visa waiver for all Bulgarian citizens.

MRF's analysis shows that the agreement is more likely to have a positive effect on the Bulgarian economy, but according to the party nonetheless the government should present a report on the effect of the document.

3. Public opinion

A survey conducted by Alfa Research between the two rounds of the presidential elections showed that the difference between GERB and BSP is diminishing. If the parliamentary elections were to be held today, GERB would receive a little above 30% of the vote, while BSP would get 28.7%. BSP almost doubled its result from two years ago, when they received 15.4%. If the election was today only five parties would be represented in Parliament. Besides GERB and BSP, only PF (6.8%), MRF (5.7%) and RB (4%) would have MPs.

Alfa Research does not rule out the possibility, in the event of the founding of parties by Veselin Mareshki and Slavi Trifonov, that they also have chances of entering Parliament.

4. Main Conclusions and Forecasts

1. The resignation of the government placed the country before a new political situation. The challenges facing Bulgaria after Erdogan's threats towards Europe for allowing the influx of migrants become ever more realistic. The possibility for the country to be left without a legitimately elected government and working parliament after January 22nd, 2017 highlights the risks facing the country. The result of the presidential elections, which were won by Rumen Radev, outlined a new political situation. GERB and BSP declined to form a government in this parliament. Eventually the third parliamentary group, the Reformist Bloc, invited by the president will also fail to form a government. This means that the country will face preterm elections in the next months. It is evident that we are witnessing relocation of the main players from the political system, which will most probably be restructured during the forthcoming early parliamentary elections. The expectations and fears of the right-wing political forces that the President-elect Rumen Radev could change the foreign policy course of the country are unfounded and Bulgaria will continue its traditional political role as a loyal and predictable member of the EU and NATO.

2. GERB recorded its first heavy election defeat since the start of its formation as a party. This shows that there is tiredness within the party and weariness from its long-standing position in the governance of the country. So far, the party mainly depended on the charisma of its leader, but it is already obvious that even this asset has been exhausted. The defeat can be seen as an opportunity for GERB to reevaluate its policies and its public image and to "freshen up" the party.

3. After years of internal conflicts, the RB in its initial formation has practically collapsed.

It would seem that DSB and Radan Kanev will move in a different direction with the formation of a new political entity. The remaining parties in the Bloc continue together, but the perspectives for success in the next parliamentary elections do not seem good.

4. United Patriots – NFSB, “Ataka” and VMRO achieved a very good result in the presidential elections, which is a good indication for convincing performance in the parliamentary elections. If this result is duplicated, the United Patriots will become the third political power in the country. The migrant crisis and the conflicts near the country’s border strengthen the fears of the people and naturally this kind of formation strengthens its electoral influence.

5. BSP achieved an important election victory. This could be the beginning of an upsurge of the party and a guarantee for changes, demanded by its new leadership, headed by Kornelia Ninova. The main challenge for BSP, as the most numerous and the left party in the country commanding greatest authority, is whether the party will be able to find ways to connect with the other left formations to consolidate the left-wing political spectrum.

6. MRF’s goal in the presidential elections was to demonstrate its electoral potential. 230,000 people voted for Plamen Oresharski which is mainly due to the support he received from MRF. MRF’s main goal was to compare its result with DOST, which supported Tsetska Tsacheva. Even though DOST received more votes in Turkey among the Bulgarian citizens that reside there, in Bulgaria MRF proved that at this point in time, there is no competition on the part of DOST.

7. BDC does not have a future as a united political entity. The People’s Union with Leader Rumen Yonchev and the Bulgari-

an Democratic Centre party with Leader Krasimira Kovachka will go their separate ways after the dissolution of this parliament. The possibility of being represented in a future parliament seems unlikely.

1.1. ABV and its candidate Ivailo Kalfin made an unsatisfactory run for president. The fact that they did not explicitly give their support for BSP’s candidate Rumen Radev was not positive for the party; on the contrary, it brought about confusion among the left voters. A way for reconciliation with BSP at this stage seems impossible.

About the editor:

Professor, Ph.D. Georgi Karasimeonov teaches at Sofia University “St. Clement of Ochrid”, Director of the Institute for Political and Legal Studies. From 1991 to 1998 he was President of the Bulgarian Association for Political Science.
Contact: ipls@dir.bg



Imprint

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
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.