

BAROMETER

Political parties in Bulgaria

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- The political situation in the future will be determined by the election results. Bulgaria will soon have a new government that has been regularly chosen by parliament. Its main challenge will be the continuation of reforms in the country and seeking a balance in the complex geopolitical situation and at regional level. Intensified relations between the EU and Turkey, on one hand, and on the other between Bulgaria and Turkey, regarding the apparent intervention of the Turkish state during the elections in Bulgaria, require a careful approach by the Bulgarian government.
- GERB won the elections and that confirmed the party as a major player in the right space. Boyko Borisov will soon set up his third office, most probably in coalition with the United Patriots. In the medium term this could lead to difficulties in the work of the government because of the evident differences on key issues between the two formations.
- BSP regained its position of hegemony in the left space. Although it lost the elections, the party expanded its influence and will be a strong opposition. It will be very hard for the other leftist parties – ABV - Movement 21 and the «Bulgarian Social Democrats» party to find the strength to continue their own party political life. So the question facing BSP is to find a way to unification of the left and winning the next parliamentary elections with a convincing result.

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1. The political situation

1.1. Internal Policy

The first quarter of 2017 was marked by the election campaign for early parliamentary elections and the first steps the new president Rumen Radev, who took office on January 22. One of the first tasks facing him was to dissolve parliament, to set a date for early elections and appoint a caretaker government. He did this in the first week of his term of office. Professor Ognyan Gerdzhikov was appointed as caretaker Prime Minister. He was chairman of the National Assembly during the reign of NDSV / 2001-2005 /, one of the leading figures created by the former party of King Simeon Saxe-Coburg of Gotha. Educated as a lawyer, professor of law at Sofia University, Gerdzhikov is an authoritative figure who enjoys the approval of a wide range of political space. Therefore, the first reactions after his appointment were positive.

Among the leading figures of the caretaker government are the four deputy prime ministers. Dr. Ilko Semerdzhiev, who is the caretaker Health Minister. Semerdzhiev was one of the strongest critics of the reform, which sought to advance the former health minister, Petar Moskov. Deputy Prime Minister for internal order and security and caretaker Defense Minister is retired General Stefan Yanev. Malina Krumova was appointed caretaker Deputy Prime Minister for EU funds. Denitsa Zlateva was appointed caretaker Deputy Prime Minister for the Preparation of the Bulgarian Presidency of the EU Council in 2018.

Other leading figures in the caretaker government are Interior Minister Plamen

Uzunov, Minister of Finance Kiril Ananiev, Minister of Education and Science Prof. Nikolai Denkov, Minister of Foreign Affairs Radi Naydenov, and Minister of Economy Teodor Sedlarski.

President Radev set three tasks for the caretaker government: conducting fair elections accelerating the preparation of the Bulgarian presidency of the EU Council and a review of the legacy of the previous government. He urged the caretaker government to maintain its political detachment and put an emphasis on professionalism in their work. The president stressed that the government designated by him would act within the terms of the election campaign and stressed dialogue between the political parties, so its neutrality is essential.

In its activities the caretaker government adhered to the tasks set by the president. Prime Minister Gerdzhikov gave an overview of the status of individual ministries, as a number of irregularities in public procurement had been referred to. The government has changed most governors in the country, which has met with a critical response from GERB, the hitherto ruling party, and the Reformist Bloc. But this has recently been common practice in Bulgarian politics and does not come as any surprise. The former caretaker government headed by Georgi Bliznashki replaced all the governors, heads of agencies and boards of state companies.

The greatest number of layoffs was in the Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Health. The government overturned the reform linked to fingerprints from the previous Health Minister Petar Moskov. Preparation for the country's presidency of the EU Council in

2018 has been accelerated.

The most serious challenge facing the government was the obvious attempt at intervention by Turkey in the electoral process in the country. Representatives of the Turkish state - ministers, MPs and other officials clamored for Bulgarian citizens of Turkish origin living in Turkey to vote for DOST - the party of the former president of MRF, Lyutvi Mestan. There was no delay in the reaction of the Bulgarian state. Foreign Minister Radi Naidenov declared that there had been interference by Turkey in the internal affairs of Bulgaria, calling it inadmissible. Bulgaria's ambassador to Ankara, Nadezhda Neynsky was called to Bulgaria for consultation and was not in Turkey during the elections, which was a clear sign in diplomatic language that there has been a breach of good neighborly dialogue by Turkey.

Ambassador of the Republic of Turkey in Bulgaria, Syuleyman Gyokche, who for months had been going round the country to DOST events, was summoned to the Foreign Ministry for explanations. Bulgarian counterintelligence - DANS expelled several Turkish citizens of Bulgaria, who were deemed to be threatening national security, whilst others were forbidden to enter the country for a period of five years.

In fact, the elections in the country took place normally, if we do not count the actions of the United Patriots who attempted to block the Bulgarian-Turkish border to stop buses with immigrants from Turkey coming into the country to vote in the elections.

The pre-term parliamentary elections, held on March 26, were won by GERB. GERB

received the votes of 1,147,292 voters, or 32.65 percent of the valid votes. Second was «BSP for Bulgaria», as 955,490 people or 27.19% voted for it. United Patriots remained third with 318,513 votes or 9.07 percent. Fourth was MR with 315,976 votes or 8.99%. Also with a parliamentary representation will be a new party «Volya» of the businessman Veselin Mareshki, for which 145,637 or 4.14% voted. Thus five formations surpassed the 4 percent electoral threshold for entry into parliament. The three right-wing coalitions that appeared separately in the elections - «New Republic», «Yes, Bulgaria» and the Reformist Bloc, did not enter the National Assembly. Each of the three formations accounted for about three percent of the vote. The cumulative votes of the three parties and coalitions amounts to approximately 300,000 votes of «right» voters who will not actually be represented in the 44th Parliament. The union DOST achieved 2.9% and did not enter parliament either. The other left formation ABV - Movement 21 suffered a collapse in the election result with 1.59 percent of the vote. Turnout was 54.7%, or 5% higher than the previous parliamentary elections in 2014. The make-up of the 44th National Assembly as regards the number of MPs from parties and formations represented in it will look like this: GERB - 95 BSP - 80, United Patriots - 27 MRF - 26 «Volya» - 12 members.

Within one month of the election, President Rumen Radev must convene the new National Assembly for their first meeting. Only then will the procedure start for awarding the mandate to the victorious election political force to form a government. Viewed realistically, there could be a new government in late April or the beginning of May.

1.2. Foreign and European policy

Over the past quarter the first foreign actions of President Radev have been of interest. During the presidential campaign, he was accused by his opponents on the right that he was a pro-Russian candidate. Radev refuted these suggestions with his actions and messages at the beginning of his term as president. His first visit abroad was to Brussels, which was a clear sign of his foreign policy orientation. Radev took part in the Council of the European Union, which urged a unified European policy on refugees, stating that Bulgaria is country which, as an external border of the Union is making every effort to stop the flow of immigrants. Again he developed his thesis of the campaign that one must distinguish between refugees fleeing war and economic migrants.

At a meeting with representatives of the refugee communities in Bulgaria and the Balkan countries in Ankara, Erdogan levied the criticism that Bulgaria «put pressure» on the Turks in the country before the parliamentary elections, which according to him was «unacceptable.» He urged Bulgaria to provide all conditions for fair and transparent elections on March 26, and to allow all its citizens to exercise their vote in an environment of peace and security. In his words, Turkey does not interfere in the politics of other countries, but at the same time has the right to defend the democratic rights and freedoms of compatriots in the respective country.

There was a reaction from the Bulgarian president Rumen Radev, who said that «Bulgaria neither gives, nor accepts lessons on democracy, especially from countries

that do not respect the rule of law.» Radev said that «every politician must learn the lessons of history and geography» and added that elections would take place peacefully, because «Bulgaria is a European country that is led by its laws, and not by foreign emotions.»

At the invitation of President Radev, the President of the European Council, Donald Tusk, whom Bulgaria supported for a new mandate, visited Bulgaria. The theme of refugees was a major topic of conversation.

1.3. Refugee Crisis

During this quarter a significant reduction in the flow of migrants to Bulgaria has been observed. With warmer weather, however, the refugee wave is likely to increase. The Bulgarian government anxiously monitored the souring of relations between the EU and Turkey and between Turkey and Bulgaria in particular. There are growing concerns that Erdogan may carry out his threats to launch migrants towards Europe, which will affect Bulgaria especially.

In late March, the caretaker government annulled decree number 208 of the previous government, related to the integration of refugees into municipalities. Even during his presidential campaign Radev criticized this ordinance, which obliged municipalities to receive refugees and to provide conditions for integration. The reasons for this annulment are that there are not any well-defined specific mechanisms for the integration of refugees, which is why the government undertook to draw up a new ordinance.

2. Status and development of the main political parties

2.1. Socialdemocratic and other left-centrist parties

2.1.1. BSP

2.1.1.1 Status

An important event in an internal plan of BSP was meeting of the party congress that was conducted in early February. It was extremely important for the leader of the BSP, Kornelia Ninova, in her desire to reform the party with constitutional changes that would give time for its renewal. The meeting was attended by 728 delegates from across the country and over 2,000 guests. The delegates of the 49th Congress of the Bulgarian Socialist Party accepted the election platform of the party for the pre-term parliamentary elections. Kornelia Ninova said that BSP would lay the foundation for a different Bulgaria, in which the state would have its own role in the economy. According to her, BSP started with the beginning of this change with the election of Rumen Radev and Iliana Yotova as President and Vice President of Bulgaria. She announced that the main objective of the party is to «save the nation and Bulgarianness and give a horizon to the state.» Ninova said that BSP will save Bulgaria from the «parallel state mafia and corruption» that costs taxpayers 10 billion levs a year.

Among the accents of the election platform of the BSP were creating an «Innovation» fund and an «Industry» fund, and conducting a balanced foreign policy. The platform was completed with proposals for a doubling of the funds for treatment abroad for children with disabilities and a significant increase in the number of teachers.

At the congress it was decided to rename the coalition «BSP - left Bulgaria» to «BSP for Bulgaria.» According to Kornelia Ninova, the party needs a fundamentally new approach to the formation of coalitions. She reported that the current structure and composition of the coalition has exhausted the possibilities of extending the electoral influence of the BSP. According to her, this conclusion is also necessitated by the fact that in the last local elections the current composition of the coalition achieved the worst results since the democratic changes in the country. She pointed out that BSP winning formula for participation in elections is a coalition of parties that will propose and implement a management program for the realization of economic growth, social justice and the protection of Bulgarian citizens. The new format of the coalition saw the exclusion of the party «Drom», which subsequently appeared separately in the pre-term parliamentary elections and the party «Bulgarian Social Democrats,» which is a member of Socialist International, but which did not participate in the elections.

BSP made an active campaign in the constituencies. The party placed its faith in new faces - some of them popular and established in their professions in recent years like the journalists Toma Tomov and Elena Yoncheva, Prof. Ivo Hristov and young figures in the party as Krum Zarkov and Stoyan Mirchev.

BSP lost the election to GERB and remained second in number of votes, but doubled its number of seats and now there will be 80. The party was voted for by over 955,000 voters or 27%. This result indicates that the BSP is in the ascendancy and that the party is emerging

as a political force able to consolidate almost all the space left. BSP practically doubled its result in the biggest Bulgarian cities - Sofia, Plovdiv, Varna and Burgas, compared to the previous parliamentary elections in 2014. This is one reason why the group of the Left in the 44th National Assembly is over twice as much as in the previous Parliament. In the 23rd constituency in the capital 58,000 voted for the Socialists, compared with 33,000 three years ago. In the 24th constituency the result was 44,000, compared with 24,000 and in the 25th constituency, where the driving force was BSP leader Kornelia Ninova it was 51,000 compared with 24,000 last time. The increase for BSP is also significant in the city of Plovdiv, where BSP 41,000 voted, compared with 20,000 in the previous elections. In Varna the votes now number 53,000, compared with 25,000 previously.

Kornelia Ninova described the election result achieved by the BSP as a great success. Its assessment is that only 10 months after her becoming leader of the party, the BSP has tripled support for itself - from 10% last year to nearly 30% in these elections. Ninova said that the current result of the BSP is better than the results of the first round of presidential elections. She rejected the idea of an aging BSP and that young people do not like the party, which was strongly refuted by the election results. Ninova said that despite the loss in these elections, the BSP has achieved great success, since consolidation on the political left is a fact. According to her, it has formed a complex balance of power in parliament.

Ninova said the BSP would not make a coalition with GERB and urged that calm be ensured for GERB in their attempt to form a

government. In her words, there are serious differences between the programs of the two parties, and that there is no way a grand coalition of any kind could be formed. If GERB failed to form a cabinet and a mandate were given to BSP, the party would try to form a government.

At the party plenum Ninova asked for a vote of confidence from her colleagues. She received the support of the National Council. Thus she strengthened her leadership. With the large parliamentary group in the 44th National Assembly, the expectation is that the BSP will be a strong opposition and a stabilizing force in government.

It was a sign of success and recognition for BSP that Kornelia Ninova was chosen for vice president of the Socialist International.

Development of intra-party democracy

At the party congress in February, after a proposal from Ninova, her proposed amendments to the statutes were adopted, which met with strong resistance on the part of influential figures in the party. The new statutes provide for more democracy, clear rights and responsibilities of all party organs, renewal of the party and better organization. They plan to expand the circle of people who will take important party decisions, including the election of the party chair. Changes in the statutes limit to three the number of terms of office which MPs from the party can hold in the National Assembly. So the election lists saw the exclusion of emblematic figures such as former party leader Mihail Mikov, former defense minister in the «Oresharski» Cabinet, Angel Naydenov, the socialist with the greatest amount of parliamentary experience, Yanaki Stoilov, and former chairman of

the parliamentary group of «Coalition for Bulgaria» in the 42nd National Assembly, Atanas Merdzhanov. Opponents of this change accused Kornelia Ninova of revenge against the previous BSP leadership, with her main goal being the removal of internal party opponents.

At the meeting of the Congress a proposal was made to introduce a period of mandates of MEPs from the left to 15 years, but this was rejected by delegates. Under the adopted amendments the party chairman will be elected by direct internal party elections, which must involve at least half of the members of BSP. Each party leader can lead the party a maximum of two terms, or a total of eight years. If one were meanwhile to become Prime Minister, however, the number of years in the executive would not count.

2.1.2.2 Recommendations

Changes in the statutes pave the way for opening the party to voters, especially the young, who over the years have been a major problem for the BSP. Therefore the next steps can be towards even more expansion of intra-party democracy by giving greater opportunity for participation in local structures in making decisions and defining the policies of the party and also the development of truly active horizontal structures, which will increase its potential.

2.2.2. ABV - Movement 21

2.2.2.1 Status

After the failure in the presidential elections leftist formations - ABV and Movement 21 signed an agreement on general appearance of in pre-term parliamentary elections. Although in recent years the relationship between

Georgi Parvanov and Tatyana Doncheva had been tense, they buried the hatchet in order to increase their chances of entering parliament.

At the beginning of this year, ABV made a number of changes. Party leader Georgi Parvanov resigned as did his deputies Rumen Petkov and Ivaylo Kalfin. Parvanov announced personal reasons for his resignation. He said he was not leaving politics, but would continue to help ABV with his experience. Parvanov said that the resignations of personalities from the current leadership of the party gave it the chance to choose a leader unburdened by policy makers. The party congress elected Konstantin Prodanov as new leader. He was born in 1977, graduated in international relations from the legal faculty of Sofia University «St. Kliment Ohridski» and in 2001 attained an MA in finance in Tokyo, Japan. From 2001 to 2011, he worked in banking in Tokyo, in some of the most renowned global investment banks like Goldman Sachs and UBS. In his last year as President Georgi Parvanov was his adviser on economic and financial issues. In 2014, he was ABV's candidate for MEP in the European parliamentary elections. The new leader announced his ambition to open the party up more to citizens. According to him, it was necessary to seek new forms of communication with people. One of these ways was consulting membership and supporters to provide advice and recommendations on the policies of the party. Prodanov defined its participation in power with GERB, with «what legitimates outrage and the timelessness of Boyko Borisov's party» as a fundamental error of ABV. He said the ABV should be clearly distinguished from GERB, which in his opinion is a symbol of «servility to foreign interests, corruption and mediocrity.»

According to Prodanov it is necessary to have revival and reform of the Bulgarian economy, which operates according to very outdated and inefficient models. He stated active income policy as a top priority of the party. Prodanov determined foreign policy as «complete failure» after the country had soured relations with Russia, and the previous government had failed in their nomination of Irina Bokova as UN Secretary General. The only success of the government Prodanov mentioned was the pension reform, which was run by former Social Minister of ABV, Ivaylo Kalfin.

At the Congress of the ABV outgoing chairman Georgi Parvanov said that a profound change of political model was needed. He pointed out that it was in ABV that a major element in a mixed electoral system and reducing the subsidy for political parties were first talked about. Parvanov expressed confidence that the new leadership would lead the public debate on the topic.

According to Parvanov ABV's primary mission was to «fight against the mediocrity of bipolarity in the Bulgarian policy against the political map of the major parties.» Parvanov also believes that ABV would not only have a new strong chairman, but «into Bulgarian politics would come a true leader, a modern and solid team that others would have to comply with.» Delegates at the congress elected new vice-presidents of the party. These are Mariana Todorova, Trendafil Velichkov, Marin Kirov and Assoc. Prof. Hristo Mihaylov. The former deputies of Georgi Parvanov - Ivaylo Kalfin and Rumén Petkov remain members of the Bureau of the party. The management of ABV increased from 19

to 21 members.

According to Tatyana Doncheva, leader of the Movement 21, their coalition is in favor of radical judicial reform, without mentioning her vision, that should copy the Romanian model. She said the reform should include removing the prosecution from the judiciary and that the Attorney General should be elected by parliament or be appointed by the President. Prosecutors should be reorganized by abolishing the irremovability of prosecutors, which would allow the removal of those involved in schemes of corruption.

The left-centrist bloc, as an alternative to BSP, suffered a failure in the elections. The coalition «ABV - Movement 21» received 1.59 percent of the votes - nearly a third as many votes as the two formations had in the elections in 2014. In 2014, when managed to enter parliament on its own, ABV received the support of nearly 140,000 voters. «Movement 21 then received nearly 40,000 votes - more than 1% of the vote, which gave it the opportunity to receive a party subsidy. Now because of their general performance in the elections as a coalition, neither party will receive a party subsidy.

Despite the poor results, the leader of ABV Konstantin Prodanov said that 55 thousand people had seen in them a hope for something authentic in the left center and this gives them a reason to move forward, although obviously there is no other way for the outcome to be interpreted than as disappointing, with it being far below the potential of both formations - ABV and Movement 21.

According to him, there are several factors that have led to this result of ABV. The main

thing is that for the new leadership the time has simply not come for it to be necessary to show a new face in front of people. Prodanov stressed that he had only had 10 media appearances, but the average person probably saw 2-3 of them. Prodanov stated that the political left in Bulgaria continues to be in a crisis. According to him, the formations on the left which have the greatest access to media appearances unfortunately do not fight on the battle field of conceptual collision.

It was announced by ABV that they had sent a signal to the Attorney General and the National Security Agency about the party DOST. The leader of ABV Kostadin Prodanov stated that one of the causes that the party had defended during the election campaign was the banning of DOST. According to him, institutions should consider the case for the unconstitutionality of DOST. Prodanov reported that DOST only just failed to pass the threshold of 4% to enter parliament. According to him, at some future election, it may become reality, and there is danger of a party entering the Bulgarian Parliament that follows of the interests of the regime of Erdogan.

2.1.2.2 Recommendations

The collective resignation of the former management of ABV, headed by the leader Parvanov on the eve of the elections did not allow the new leader and the new leadership of the party to establish themselves in public. If it wants to overcome the current crisis ABV needs to make significant efforts to present itself as a left alternative to BSP and to present to the electorate their specific ideological and political orientation.

2.2.3. The “Bulgarian Social Democrats” Party

2.2.3.1 Status

The party «Bulgarian Social Democrats», which is a member of the Socialist International and PES is not this time in the coalition of BSP and did not take part directly in the elections It supports the party «Volya», which just succeeded in entering parliament. However, this decision causes perplexity because “Volya” is a typical populist party with a vague ideological face.

The representative of the party leadership of Georgi Atanasov is remembered in the last quarter for a statement that he will not support Ninova for vice president of the Socialist International.

2.2.3.2 Recommendations

The party has very little influence in society and should make serious efforts to find its place in the left-centrist space, since at present BSP does not accept it as a coalition partner.

2.2. Center-right parties

2.2.1. GERB

GERB won the pre-term parliamentary elections which Boyko Borisov himself provoked with his resignation. 1,147,292 voters voted for GERB or 32.65 percent of the valid votes. So the party will have 95 MPs and a greater parliamentary group than in the last Parliament, when they had 84 MPs. GERB conducted an active campaign throughout the regions of the country, in which party leader Borisov actively took part.

In its election program GERB set as key priorities education, improving the business environment and, continuing the reform of the judicial system. The party promised the doubling of teachers’ salaries by the end of

the four-year term and higher pensions, as these increases are linked to higher economic growth, rather than by increasing taxes. The party described the minimum wage reaching 650 leva by the end of their term of office as realistic, while the national average should be 1500 leva.

Among the priorities in the program of GERB is Bulgaria's entry into the ERM-2 mechanism or the so-called waiting room of the Eurozone. In terms of health GERB said it would take steps for the demonopolization of the Health fund in the country. In the field of infrastructure - completion of the «Struma» highway, accelerated construction of the «Hemus» and «Kalotina-Sofia» highway and completion of the transport corridors Vidin-Sofia as well as Rousse - Tarnovo and the building of a tunnel under the Balkan Mountain Range.

Another focus of the program of GERB was fighting domestic crime; the party said it would appoint police officers in remote and small communities, where the biggest problems with this kind of crime are.

In an internal plan GERB carried out a renewal of party lists. Significant persons such as Rumyana Bachvarova - interior minister in the second cabinet of Borisov and the head of the political office in the Council of Ministers during the first government of GERB and the loser in the presidential elections Tsetska Tsacheva did not top the lists of GERB. There will be new MPs of GERB - Ekaterina Zaharieva, Justice Minister in the cabinet of Borisov as well as businessman Ivaylo Konstantinov and political scientist Anton Todorov.

After the elections, Borisov said that GERB had shown their strength and the people had again voted to show their trust in them. In his words, there was reason in his handing in his resignation last year, because it is the most democratic way, when one party has lost elections, to seek the confidence of voters again. Borisov said that from now on there was harder work to deal with - forming a stable government, which is what the country needs in this awkward geopolitical situation, especially in the Balkan region. He therefore urged political forces towards unity and understanding on the major issues facing the country, such as the refugee crisis and the threats of Erdogan aimed at Europe regarding migrants.

GERB has started preliminary talks on the forming of a government with the United patriots. Even during the election campaign GERB leaders said they would not form a coalition with MRF. A grand coalition with the BSP would be unnatural and impossible at this stage, especially after the serious confrontation between the two parties during the election campaign.

GERB were adamant that Boyko Borisov would be their candidate for Prime Minister, and rejected ideas of Valeri Simeonov from the United Patriots of any other application. Although serious talks with the Patriots are expected, there will probably be a coalition with them, which will happen after the convening of the National Assembly in mid-April. As winners of the elections GERB will receive the first mandate to form a government, which must be implemented within seven days, according to the country's constitution. So the most optimistic option is for there to be a new regular government

at the end of April, or the beginning of May.

2.2.2. The Reformist Bloc

In the elections the Reformist Bloc appeared in coalition with the Party of Svetlio Vitkov «People's Voice», which participated in the political life of the country's parliamentary elections in 2013 and 2014 and received more than 1% of the vote. This union was reached after Radan Kanev's DSB left the Reformist Bloc. So did the National Party of «Freedom and Dignity» (NPSD) that appeared in the elections with Lyutvi Mestan's DOST. So the Reformist Bloc were faced with the dilemma of which partners to find in order to be able to exceed the electoral barrier. In the «People's Voice» they saw a non-standard political formation that could attract the votes of younger voters.

Meglana Kuneva - the leader of DBG refused to run for MP in order to make way for younger politicians from the party. Petar Moskov, who was expelled from the DSB, became one of the key players in the campaign of Reformist Bloc, together with the leader of the UDF, Bozhidar Lukarski and Nayden Zelenogorski of DBG. In the campaign the Reformist Bloc focused on the achievements which, according to them, had been made possible with their participation in the government of Boyko Borisov - such as judicial reform, health care reform, the development of defense and armed forces, as well as their strong support for the pro-Atlantic and European orientation of the country. Throughout the campaign, the polls gave them a score around the 4% threshold necessary to enter parliament. Ultimately reformers claimed just over 3% of the vote and remained outside parliament.

After the elections the Political Council of the Bloc resigned. Petar Moskov said that they were starting a new call for the unification of right and would seek various forms of unity. According to Moskov, only if right-wing voters were together could they achieve representation in parliament. Moskov said that each of the leaders of right-wing parties was to blame for the fact that nearly 300,000 voters would not be presented in the future National Assembly. President of the UDF Bozhidar Lukarski and the entire leadership of the party resigned at a meeting of the National Executive Council due to the poor election results.

Nayden Zelenogorski for his part pointed out four priorities on which the assessment of the Reformist Bloc for future government will depend - adoption of an anti-corruption law, continuation of judicial reform, e-governance and the real introduction of machine voting.

Despite the statement of the main parties in the bloc that they will continue together in the future, it is difficult to assess whether this format has a future. There are to be many serious discussions with other parties in the right space for a possible alliance, because in these elections it was obvious that separately entry into parliament is impossible. Among the reasons for the poor result of the Reformist Bloc is the fact that it lost its own identity in the government of Borisov.

2.2.3. New Republic

Radan Kanev and DSB decided to participate in the elections with a new political label - as the coalition «New Republic». In this new format not just DSB took part, but also familiar faces from the Civic Council of the Reformist Bloc, such as the bloc's presidential

candidate - Traicho Traikov and former UDF leader Martin Dimitrov. «New Republic» was joined by MPs from the parliamentary group of GERB in the 43rd National Assembly Metodi Andreev, well-known for his fierce anti-communist rhetoric. The coalition was also joined by the «Union for Plovdiv» – a regional formation in the second largest city in Bulgaria, led by Danny Kanazireva, who in recent years has changed several parties, starting with GERB and reaching DBG. So this amalgam of individuals associated in the past with the traditional right, took part in the elections, despite the inherently poor chances of success, especially after it became clear that they would not join together with the other new right project «Yes, Bulgaria» of the former justice minister in the cabinet of Borisov.

The main focuses in the campaign of «New Republic» were judicial reform, the fight against corruption and organized crime, boosting economic growth in the country by reforming the public sector and the introduction of e-governance, as well as increasing incomes and pensions.

As expected in the elections «New Republic» received only 2.5% of the vote. After the failure in the elections Radan Kanev resigned as co-chair of the coalition «New Republic» and as chairman of the DSB. According to Kanev, everyone who has worked for the «New Republic» has achieved wonders in «an essentially hopeless campaign.» In his words, they doubled their results in the campaign. He added that the results were negative, because they had not achieved their goal of entering parliament, and this was a clear political failure. Kanev said he would not leave Bulgarian politics as he did not think it

would be a reasonable and responsible course of action with regard to people who had believed in him. According to him, the right space should be united and his resignation was a form of apology to those 300,000 right-wing voters who were not represented in the National Assembly.

2.2.4. «Yes, Bulgaria»

Former justice minister in the government of Boyko Borisov, Hristo Ivanov created a new party - «Yes, Bulgaria.» It was made up of familiar faces from the protests against the Oresharski government and the pressure group “protest network», such as Antoaneta Tsoneva. The new formation announced that it was in favor of radical judicial reform and the establishment of an anti-corruption prosecutor’s office similar to that in Romania to combat the Mafia, which has taken over the country, in their words, and building a genuine rule of law in the country. According to «Yes, Bulgaria» at the base of the change in the overall pattern is the country’s reform of the prosecution. Thus «Yes, Bulgaria» is designed as a single issue party, with no set agenda on other political issues, such as economic development, income, employment, investment, etc., which Bulgarian citizens see as priorities.

Despite expectations that the new formation of Hristo Ivanov would unite with DSB Radan Kanev, «Yes, Bulgaria» decided to participate independently in the elections. Hristo Ivanov and Radan Kanev failed to explain clearly why they did not appear together in the elections. Kanev said that his party had done everything possible to form a common coalition. For his part Hristo Ivanov said that they have no political differences, and that they are like-minded, but «Yes,

Bulgaria» decided to participate on their own to be able to show their own face.

Since the party was established shortly before the elections and because of the appeal against its registration, it did not manage to register in time to participate independently in the elections. Therefore, «Yes, Bulgaria» registered for the elections as a coalition using the registration of two other parties – the «Greens» of Borislav Sandov and the Liberal Party, DEOS.

In the elections «Yes, Bulgaria» claimed about three percent of the vote or slightly more than 100,000 votes, but it was far below the threshold to enter parliament. Hristo Ivanov said he would not resign as leader and assessed the result achieved as positive. According to him, despite the fierce media campaign against the party, and although it had only existed for 10 weeks, it managed to attract 100,000 voters. According to him, if there had been time for one more week's campaign, «Yes, Bulgaria» would have entered parliament. Ivanov expressed regret that the traditional right would have no representation in the new parliament, saying that his party would work even more ambitiously in the future in order to achieve the objectives it has set itself. He commented that taking responsibility means going ahead with twice the effort and humility. In his words the results of the party elections are a success and a «very good start to a marathon that can change Bulgaria.»

Hristo Ivanov called upon Boyko Borisov not to become Prime Minister because it would be harmful for Bulgarian democracy. In his words, GERB has enough experts to give a more democratic make-up of a government.

Ivanov believes that the leader of GERB cannot produce the change which society needs. According to him the sole management model of Borisov should be a thing of the past, but this election people were restricted in their choice between the former prime minister and Kornelia Ninova. The leader of «Yes, Bulgaria» stressed that this Parliament cannot be a parliament of change because in it will be the same people. According to the leadership of the party, parliament should only accept changes in the election rules requested by referendum to dissolve itself.

Therefore, «Yes, Bulgaria» appeared in the elections in a coalition, as well as other players on the right – the Reformist Bloc and the «New Republic» will not receive a party subsidy that is applied to parties which have not surpassed the electoral barrier, but have more than 1%, if they appeared in the elections independently as a party. This seriously diminishes the possibility of the development of a new party such as «Yes, Bulgaria.»

2.3. Centrist Parties

2.3.1. MRF

For MRF these elections were particularly important because for the first time they had a strong competitor for Turkish and Muslim votes, which was supported by the Turkish state. In the last elections the National Party «Freedom and Dignity» (NPSD) of Kasim Dal and Korman Ismailov, which was part of the Reformist Bloc could not make a major breakthrough to claim a large share of the electorate MRF. In these elections, however, the situation was different. As mentioned already, DOST launched an aggressive campaign against MRF, which included representatives of the Turkish state.

Therefore, MRF held a dynamic, eventful campaign on site with the aim of counteracting DOST and mobilizing their voters.

A week before the elections on the site of MRF an address of the honorary president of the movement Ahmed Dogan was published, causing serious repercussions in the country and outside Bulgaria, since for the first time a politician of Turkish ethnicity openly opposed the regime of Erdogan. In his address Dogan indicated that geopolitical shifts and changes on a global scale created a sense of uncertainty and anxiety. According to him, the country lacks a consensus on the key priorities and the chaotic change of elites is one of the main reasons for the lower standard, poverty and rampant populism. According to the honorary president of the movement, sustainable development of Bulgarian national interests requires the need for «moderate and intelligent Bulgarian nationalism.» Dogan warned that the Balkans are a territory that was formerly filled with conflict and if the leading political principle were to become restoration of “former possessions », in his words, it was «certain that the world order would head towards total breakdown. « Dogan referred directly to the Turkey of Erdogan and stated that any claim to Bulgaria as a «former territory» affects its national identity and vision for the future. According to him «the pressure, extortion, coercion and threats were also aimed at restoring the ‘democratic’ legitimization of neo-Ottomanism.» He stated that it would not surprise him if there were a transfer of conflict and confrontation into the Balkans and into Europe. Since the referendum in Turkey on April 16 seeks to «convert the Kemalist Republic of Turkey into the Sultanate,» which

he called «insanity, but a fact». In his address Dogan appealed to all Bulgarian citizens - Christians and Muslims, and to all ethnicities to give a «historical lesson” to all those who think they have a «historical right to supervise and control us».

Dogan’s words come as no surprise because MRF has always supported the secular model of Kemalist Turkey and traditionally maintains ties with the Republican Party there, while NPSD and Lyutvi Mestan’s DOST are rather close to the regime of Erdogan and rely on his support.

In the elections 315,000 people voted for MRF, or 9% of the vote, putting it in fourth place. The party will have 26 members in the new parliament.

The political split among Bulgarian Turks and Muslims dealt a partial blow to the MRF, which for the first time lost its leading position in the vote abroad. 13,390 Bulgarian citizens abroad voted for the party of Ahmed Dogan. This was 11.9% of the valid votes abroad. This result left the movement down in fourth place in the election list. Hitherto the MRF had invariably received the largest share of the vote abroad. Now «Unification DOST» claimed second place in the vote abroad with 19,430 votes (17.28 percent). Expectations were not justified, however, that immigrants would vote en masse in favor of DOST. In many sections in Turkey and the results of the MRF and DOST were very similar. For example, in one of the two sections in Ankara DOST took 511 votes, while 479 people cast their ballots for MRF. In the only section in Edirne Mestan got 268 votes, while Dogan received 217. Such cases can be seen also in Istanbul and Bursa, where there is a large community of immigrants.

After the elections, the MRF said the management of GERB and the United patriots is unacceptable and if this came to be, they would be in opposition. Although they belong to the family of liberal European parties MRF is not considered a potential partner by other parties, because it continues to damage the reputation of a corporate party, which is building an image in Bulgarian society. MRF is not yet taking steps to shake off this negative image. Also in these elections the «oligarch» Delian Peevski was top of two MRF lists - in Pazardzhik and in Blagoevgrad - and was again elected to the National Assembly.

2.3.2. DOST

The DOST Party of Lyutvi Mestan is an election coalition with the People's Party «Freedom and Dignity» (NPSD), which was part of the Reformist Bloc within the 43rd National Assembly. The party, founded by Kasim Dal and Korman Ismailov, replaced its management and was led by Orhan Ismailov - Deputy Minister of Defense in the cabinet of Boyko Borisov that resigned. NPSD left the Reformist Bloc at the beginning of February. Thus it ended up in a coalition with the party DOST, and in the elections the two formations appeared as the union DOST.

As has already been mentioned, DOST and support of the Turkish state for the party were the main topics during the election campaign. Ambassador of the Republic of Turkey in Bulgaria Syuleyman Gyokche was filmed in a DOST campaign clip that led to the intervention of the Central Election Commission of the country, which was approached by the state media regulator - the Broadcasting Council and the clip was taken off the air. Throughout the campaign

there were reports of canvassing in Turkey in favor of DOST and buses to Bulgaria were organized in the week before the elections, which has also happened at other times over the years, when buses from Turkey with Bulgarian citizens emigrants have come to vote for MRF in elections.

The strongest campaigning for DOST was in the region of Kardzhali, where political tension became acute during the campaign, but no incidents of more gravity took place. As expected, DOST failed to overcome the electoral barrier, although it received 100,000 votes in the elections.

At a press conference after the elections Mestan said the union DOST had achieved a «unique result for the party, which was only six months after the beginning of the election campaign.» In his words, the 100,000 plus votes that were received had «smashed the monopoly of MRF in ethnically mixed areas.» According to Mestan, DOST would have got into parliament if “an aggressive and unconstitutional campaign had not been built against them.» In his words «arrogant leaders of the United patriots had committed outrages at the border, exerting physical violence on Bulgarian citizens who had come to their homeland to practice their constitutional right to vote.»

According to Mestan there were difficulties in the voting process that deprived thousands of people of their right to vote with the introduction of the requirements of the CEC declaration of voters abroad, that they would not vote elsewhere in the country, and that they had to sign with their own hand before the committee. This, according to Mestan, constituted the introduction of educational

qualifications for voting.

Mestan submitted a signal to the chief Prosecutor with which he wants a full investigation of the obstruction of Bulgarian citizens to exercise their right to vote, and «the waiving of immunity of Valeri Simeonov and Krasimir Karakachanov for their participation in an organized criminal group, as well as of members of GERB and BSP who had also participated in this group that enforced the introduction of the requirement that Bulgarians abroad had to fill in their declaration by their own hand. «

Mestan stated that DOST does not recognize the elections as fair and transparent and will ask for them to be annulled. According to Mestan for DOST any option to form a government with the participation of MRF is unacceptable, because «this formation should be eradicated from Bulgarian politics.» DOST would not accept the forming of a government with extreme nationalist formations that are not recognised by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. He said the future government in this parliament would «be held hostage either by fascists or by MRF.»

2.3.3. «Volya» (Will)

The new party «Volya» of the businessman Veselin Mareshki was one of the parties that were observed with increased attention because polls showed throughout the election campaign that it was a certain participant in the next parliament. Some studies even showed that «Volya» could get 8% of the vote. These forecasts were due to the fact that in the presidential election last year Mareshki achieved a surprisingly high score, receiving over 420,000 votes or 11% of the vote.

The political career of Veselin Mareshki began in 2007, when he was elected municipal councilor in Varna from the pages of Order, Law and Justice (OLJ). In the local elections in 2011 he was a candidate for mayor in Varna, erected as an independent and reached second round, losing to the mayor at the time, Kiril Yordanov.

A businessman with a chain of pharmacies and petrol stations, Mareshki focused in his campaign slogan on fighting cartels trading in fuels and the reduction of prices in the sector. Indeed the party «Volya» is a classic case of a business party - its employees were placed on many of its lists. And one way of canvassing in the campaign was via his pharmacies. On the whole, this party has no clear ideological vision and is populist in nature.

Despite expectations for a high score, «Volya» won 4.14% just over the 4-percent electoral barrier and will have 12 MPs.

After the election Mareshki said he was inclined to support the cabinet of GERB and Boyko Borisov, if invited, but he would want to participate with ministers in it. Mareshki announced the desire of the party to apply for membership in the ENP (United People's Party) after announcing that it was essentially a center-right one, although during the campaign it had never been described as such. He added that the best option to form a government was for only the Euro-Atlantic oriented formations – GERB, MRF and “Volya” to participate in it. In his words, these were the only formations that had «come out honestly to the electorate - independently, with their own personality

and agenda, not unprincipled coalitions.»

2.4. Nationalist Parties

2.4.1. United Patriots

The coalition of the nationalist parties VMRO, NFSB and «Ataka», which raised Krasimir Karakachanov and Yavor Notev for presidential election, maintains its unity and again appeared in this format in the pre-term parliamentary elections. Although they have ideological differences, the three formations participated together to mobilize the whole nationalist electorate with ambition of becoming an indispensable coalition partner in the future government. One of the main differences between «Ataka» and NFSB, for example, is the attitude towards Russia - if «Ataka» is pro-Russian oriented, NFSB considers Putin's regime as a threat to Bulgaria. This topic, however, was not placed clearly on the agenda during the campaign; the emphasis was shifted to the danger that comes from Turkey. This became a major issue for nationalists throughout the election campaign. The second major theme on which the United Patriots put focus was the issue of poverty, increasing incomes of pensioners and raising the minimum wage.

Representatives of the United Patriots stopped traffic at the entrances of the three border crossings «Kapitan Andreevo», «Lesovo» and «Malko Tarnovo» two days before the elections. The organizers blocked all the cars and buses coming from Turkey in order to stop the so-called election tourism. There were altercations with Bulgarian citizens of Turkish origin, also involving leaders of the United Patriots. Police intervened and restored order at the checkpoints. This footage was widely covered in the media and was the cause of

examination by the prosecution.

United Patriots were third in the election result with 9.07% and will have 27 MPs. Thus they became the only real possible partner for GERB in future government. Although GERB and the United Patriots have a total majority of 122 MPs, Valeri Simeonov turned to GERB and BSP to establish a broad government with their participation, to ensure political stability in the long term. According to him, the government would have the support of 202 MPs and this would relieve the public tension created in the recent years of political crises. According to him, this could be in the form of a program, a government of experts that the three parties would support. He stressed that the geopolitical situation is very complex and we should not have to think who would govern and which variant of government is best for Bulgaria. Valeri Simeonov stressed that if such a coalition were formed, Boyko Borisov should not be Prime Minister, which effectively dooms the talks to failure from the outset.

VMRO leader Krasimir Karakachanov reiterated the thesis of Valeri Simeonov that a broad coalition between GERB and BSP «United Patriots» would be a successful formula for the government of the country. Karakachanov, however, is skeptical that this could happen. He believes that the best option is to achieve national consensus between the main political forces on the most urgent tasks facing the country.

Karakachanov said that the topics they care about are raising pensions, the reduction of domestic crime, economic development and coping with the demographic crisis. If agreement were reached, this time the

Patriots would want to have their ministers to defend their policies in government.

After BSP categorically ruled out a coalition with GERB in any form, the United Patriots started negotiations with the winning party to form a government. United Patriots excluded the party “Volya” of Veselin Mareshki as a possible partner in the future government, announcing that the new formation was unpredictable.

The first talks were held at the headquarters of GERB shortly after the elections. Unofficially, it became clear that the United Patriots would insist on four ministries in the future government - defense, energy and culture, with the fourth ministerial seat still being undecided.

2.5. Positions of the parties on foreign and European policy

Foreign and European policy was one of the accents in the election programs of the parties. During the election campaign, some general consensus issues that unite the parties were outlined, but also some significant differences. On the whole, all the major parties across the political spectrum, including nationalist formations attach great importance to the upcoming presidency from Bulgaria of the EU Council next year. All the parties are united in understanding that the country must prepare well for the presidency and that this could position Bulgaria in a new way in the EU and strengthen the authority of the country.

In other foreign policy topics some significant differences are observed. The left, represented by BSP, but also by ABV is in favor of the removal of sanctions against

Russia because, according to them they are counterproductive and harmful to Bulgaria. Right-wing groups, represented by GERB and the smaller right-wing parties are in favor of maintaining sanctions and the adherence of Bulgaria to the pan-European decision in this respect. In this regard, they accused the BSP of being a pro-Russian party that cares about Russian and not Bulgarian interests. This was one line of criticism of the BSP by the right during the election campaign. After the elections, the leader of PES Sergey Stanishev stated that one of the weaknesses of BSP was that it could not explain its position better and counter the idea that it is not pro-European. BSP identified this actually as a mistake, arguing that it was during their government of the country that Bulgaria became an EU member. The attitude of Borisov and GERB towards Russia is more pragmatic and balanced. GERB considers that Bulgaria should have friendly relations with Russia because the two countries are historically close, but violations of international law which Russia has committed with the annexation of Crimea cannot be accepted.

Another topic that distinguishes the BSP and the right-wing formations is their attitude to the Agreement CETA. BSP insists that it is in the interests of large corporations and will not protect European businesses and consumers. Socialists fear that the agreement will open the doors to GMO foods in Bulgaria and it was one of their messages during the election campaign. Right-wing formations evaluated CETA positively and believe that it will lead to more competition and generally will have a positive economic impact for the EU and Bulgaria in particular.

In terms of increased tension between

Bulgaria and Turkey nuances in the positions of the various parties are also observed. Understandably, United Patriots are the most extreme in their positions. They even said that after the convening of the National Assembly they will introduce a bill to eliminate dual citizenship for Bulgarian citizens of Turkish origin. This proposal will presumably lead to serious tension in parliament in the coming months if the United Patriots resort to such a step.

GERB also condemned interference in the internal affairs of Bulgaria by Turkey, even though their evaluations were more cautious with regard to refugee danger. BSP, however, insist on a tougher approach to Turkey, which must respect the sovereignty of the country and adhere to the policy of good neighborliness.

3. Public Opinion

Alpha Research in February suggests that the new president Rumen Radev has the highest rating among Bulgarian politicians; he has the support of 51% of the respondents. He is followed by GERB leader, Boyko Borisov, with 32.3%, the difference between the two being about 19%. VMRO leader, Krasimir Karakachanov was third with 30.7 percent. Kornelia Ninova follows with 25.2%, then Veselin Mareshki with 24.3% Tatyana Doncheva of Movement 21 with 20.3%, and the leader of NFSB Valeri Simeonov with 13.7%.

The study also shows that the attitude of Bulgarians after 10 years of membership of Bulgaria in the EU is markedly positive. 56% believe that the country has won more than lost from EU membership. 27% take the opposite view.

The survey shows that the main problems facing Bulgaria continue to be: low income (58%); corruption (46%); domestic crime (41%); emigration of young Bulgarians abroad (35%); failure to comply with the law (27%). Conversely, the state of infrastructure and unemployment, which were key issues years ago, has now come down to the bottom of the list (10%).

4. Major Conclusions and Forecasts

1. The political situation in the future will be determined by the election results. Bulgaria will soon have a new government regularly chosen by parliament; its main challenge will be the continuation of reforms in the country and seeking a balance in the complex situation at a geopolitical and regional level. Intensified relations between the EU and Turkey - on the one hand, and between Bulgaria and Turkey, on the other, regarding the apparent intervention of the Turkish state during the elections in Bulgaria, require a careful approach by the Bulgarian government. Such actions by Turkey are unacceptable, so Bulgaria should push for a common European position in relation to the increasing demands of Turkey on Europe, especially in the context of refugees.

2. GERB won the elections and that confirmed the party as a major player in the right space. Boyko Borisov will soon set up his third cabinet, probably in coalition with the United Patriots. In the medium term this could lead to difficulties in the work of the government because of the obvious differences on key issues between the two formations. The challenge facing GERB and Borisov is that this time there will be strong opposition in the face of the BSP, which has a large parliamentary group. MRF will also

surely be in opposition to the government.

3. The traditional right wing in Bulgaria was represented by three political entities in these elections: «Reformist Bloc», «New Republic» and «Yes, Bulgaria», which was the reason for them staying outside parliament. Thus nearly 300,000 voters will not be presented and in the medium and long term is the issue of a new approach to the representation of these voters. Obviously, with these leaders and the parties up to the present that cannot happen, because every one of the leaders of these formations is to blame for the result they received.

4. BSP regained its position of hegemony on the left. Although it lost the elections, the party expanded its influence and will be strong opposition. Other leftist parties, ABV - Movement 21 and the party «Bulgarian Social Democrats» will find it very hard to summon the strength to continue their own party political life. So the question facing BSP is to find a way to unify the left and win the next parliamentary elections with a more convincing result.

5. MRF maintained its position among

the Turkish population in the country, despite competition from DOST with the support of the Turkish state. MRF, however, remain in isolation because they did not find the strength to shake off its corporate relationships and the negative image that they had built up in recent years. This remains a major challenge facing the party in the future. For DOST the prospects for development after not entering parliament at this stage seem to be rather negative. Probably the future of the project will depend on the processes under way in Turkey and what will happen there in the referendum on 16 April.

6. The Party «Volya» is a new entity that is unlikely to remain homogeneous in the next parliament. As a business formation without a clear program, this entity will probably fall apart, mainly under pressure from GERB, which will seek to win over some MPs of «Volya» to expand their majority in parliament.

7. United Patriots will probably be a coalition partner of GERB. They remain radical and unpredictable player. Between the separate parties there are differences that over time can cause division among them. So far, nationalist formations have not participated directly in the government of Bulgaria, and this could damage the country's image among EU partners.

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