

A world map with a red square highlighting Bulgaria in the Balkans region of Europe.

# BAROMETER

## Political parties in Bulgaria

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- At the end of 2017 political tensions in the country intensified. The reasons for this are the increased confrontation between GERB and BSP, which led to a series of scandals, resignations and mutual accusations. All this could have a negative impact on the EU Council Presidency, starting on January 1st. Successful running of the Presidency is a major objective of the government and ruling majority.
- In recent months BSP has proved that there may be an active opposition. In addition to developing alternative policies, the party has exposed a number of irregularities that have pushed GERB into an explanatory regime and has even become a cause for resignation among government officials. However, in an internal party plan, the tension between BSP leader Kornelia Ninova and the opposition in the party, which was also seen at the congress, continues. Although Ninova has consolidated her leadership position, balance in the party seems fragile, and at the first major political tremors, the opposition may seek revenge.
- The extra-parliamentary right in the face of DSB and Yes, Bulgaria, together with other centrist formations like the Greens and DEOS (The Movement for European Unification and Solidarity), started a unification process with the launch of the Bulgarian Manifesto for Europe initiative. The main purpose of these formations is to become a real right-wing alternative to GERB, although at this stage sociological surveys show low voting support, insufficient to overcome the electoral barrier.

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## 1. The political situation

### 1.1 Domestic policy

Despite expectations of a decrease in domestic tension in the face of the forthcoming presidency of the EU Council on January 1, 2018, the confrontation between those in power and the opposition has intensified in the last months of the year. Relations between GERB and BSP have been exacerbated by daily political attacks and scandals, which were the focus of media attention in October and November. The peak of the confrontation reached a turning point after National Assembly Speaker Dimitar Glavchev asked BSP leader Kornelia Ninova to leave a parliamentary session. This happened after Ninova called for Boyko Borisov to come to parliament and explain his statement that there are MPs dealing with drug trafficking in the National Assembly. The BSP parliamentary group left the plenary hall and took the decision no longer to enter the sessions of the National Assembly, except for the adoption of the budget for 2018 and the vote of no confidence in the government they intend to introduce until Glavchev hands in his resignation. Kornelia Ninova said that, with his actions, Glavchev had expressed a rude affront to parliamentarism and democracy in the country, after having expelled the leader of the opposition without any reason. The BSP said that since the beginning of the mandate of this National Assembly, the majority by all means tried to limit the actions of the opposition. The departure of BSP from the plenary hall led to quorum issues in parliamentary sessions. On the day on which the resignation of the President had to be voted on there turned out to be a little expected outcome. Prime Minister Borisov postponed a trip to Sweden because of the political crisis and went to the National Assembly. After a conversation between him

and Dimitar Glavchev, the latter resigned as chairman of the National Assembly. GERB explained this decision saying that it was done for the sake of stability in the country on the eve of the presidency, but also because of the upcoming visit by the President of the European Parliament, Antonio Tajani, and the danger of him speaking to a half-empty plenary hall.

The resignation of the Speaker of the National Assembly is a serious blow to GERB and the ruling majority. These events confirmed that BSP will continue to emerge as a strong opposition, which has a strong political resource to counteract. In Dimitar Glavchev's place as chairman of the National Assembly, Tsveta Karayancheva, deputy chairman of parliament, was elected.

The tremors in the government actually started at the end of October, when the first government resignation was filed by the Minister of Health Prof. Nikolay Petrov from the GERB quota. The resignation was the result of a BTV journalistic investigation, which showed how Nikolay Petrov, as head of the Military Medical Academy, had awarded public contracts to companies represented by the man from whom his daughter had a child. Although the Prosecutor's Office has not found any evidence of a crime, and the violation committed by Nikolay Petrov is only administrative, according to the opposition, such acts are morally condemned and the resignation of the Minister is justified. Prof. Petrov said he did nothing wrong, and his resignation is a moral act with which he wants to clear his name, which he has made as a specialist for decades. For the new minister of health, former Deputy Minister of Finance Kiril Ananiev was elected, a proven financier, a long-time Deputy Minister of Finance in various governments. Until now, Ananiev was Chairman of the Supervisory Board of the Health Fund. His choice is

to put financial order in the healthcare system - one of the most unreformed systems in the public sector.

The tension between the president and the government also continued throughout these months. The reason for this was the draft of the new anti-corruption law and, in particular, who should appoint its leadership. The Consultative National Security Council (CNSC) on the subject of combating corruption, called by President Radev at the beginning of October, failed because of the lack of a quorum. The government's explanation was that this was due to commitments previously made by them. Many saw a boycott on the part of the ruling party. This resulted in a new meeting of the CNSC two weeks later, which also did not lead to an agreement on the anti-corruption law. BSP continues to insist that the new anti-corruption body should have investigative functions and its head should be appointed by the president, while the government's draft stipulates that the election of the head is to be carried out by the National Assembly. It is apparent that the conflicts between the president and the governors will not just fade away. In an interview with the Euractiv site, President Radev said there were contradictions in values with the government. In his words, democracy is in retreat. He cited the removal from the parliamentary stand of the opposition leader for criticizing the prime minister and the government as an example of this. However, Glavchev's resignation has shown that there is some threshold for self-preservation of parliamentarianism, but this has come after "the demonstrative intervention of Prime Minister Boyko Borisov." According to Radev, "the Bulgarian Parliament, as the highest political body in a parliamentary republic, should be independent, regulating its internal conflicts and controlling the government, and not vice ver-

sa." Radev pointed out that for him and for the vast majority of the Bulgarian people, the fight against corruption is a priority. In his words, real and effective measures by the ruling majority are needed, not past-tense anti-corruption declarations, like the revision of privatization 20 years ago. Radev called for a revision of the major public procurement contracts in recent years, the way EU funds are spent, and especially the establishment of clear mechanisms to ensure detection and prosecution of corruption. Only this, he says, can restore justice in society.

In the context of this debate, in mid-November the latest European Commission report on the progress of Bulgaria in the fight against corruption and organized crime under the Co-operation and Evaluation Mechanism was published. The monitoring mechanism remains, and the next report will be at the end of 2018. The report identifies the lack of specific results in the fight against corruption. Some progress on the recommendations is reported, but it is stated that none of them has been fully implemented. Those in power evaluated the report as objective and positive, and noted that for the first time there were no new recommendations. The opposition was of the opposite opinion, and the general conclusion was that this is yet another report that points out the same weaknesses, namely the lack of results.

In the midst of the growing rift between GERB and BSP, the government launched the idea of dropping the statute of limitations for crimes related to privatization in the country. Such an idea, however, requires a constitutional change and a majority of 180 votes, for which the votes of BSP are also necessary. The impression was that this idea was specifically directed at BSP leader Kornelia Ninova and her participation in the privatization of

Technoimpex in 1999, a topic that is periodically articulated in the public space, especially after she took the leadership position in the party. Ninova said she had never defended her participation in the privatization of the company, buying shares she had sold years ago after she went into politics. Ninova said inspections of the prosecutor's office were carried out in the past and irregularities were not detected. She pointed out that she would support a constitutional change to revise privatization, but if the scope of the scrutiny were to be extended - from concessions to the role of force groups and which of the people power today have participated in them. Many authoritative lawyers have identified the idea of dropping the limitation period as a crime in privatization as contradicting the basic principles of law. Officials say the government will use this topic to divert public attention away from other substantive issues that are on the agenda, and for which there are no results, such as the fight against corruption, for example, or will use the topic to compromise political opponents.

At the end of November, the National Assembly adopted the state budget submitted by the Council of Ministers for 2018. It includes revenues of BGN 23.515 billion. Expenditures amount to BGN 24.178 billion. The deficit is BGN 662 million. In the budget for 2018 economic growth is expected to slow gradually to 3.9%, with final consumption increasing by 4.7%, and growth in investments going up to 4.3%. When domestic demand is strengthened, growth in imports of goods and services is forecast at 7.1%. The unemployment rate is expected to be 6.2%. The minimum wage will be increased to BGN 510. Pension insurance is increased by 1%. The pensionable age from 1 January will increase each year by two months for women and one for men. Pensions will grow by 3.8%, with the average pension for

2018 being 363 BGN.

The government has declared as priority areas education, defense and security, social sphere and health care. So next year the Health Fund will receive an additional BGN 400 million. As well as this, BGN 19.7 million has been envisaged for wage increases in emergency aid. The gradual increase in teachers' remuneration continues. Next year, the amount to cover this and the next salary increase rises to 330 million leva.

### **1.2 Foreign and European policies**

With the advent of the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU on 1 January 2018, the government has set store on its regional policy. At the end of October, Prime Minister Boyko Borissov visited Bosnia and Herzegovina, where he met with his colleague Denis Zvizdic. The two prime ministers discussed the economic co-operation between the two countries and the European integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Zvizdic thanked Borisov for Bulgaria's support on its road to European integration. He said that his country expects that, during the Bulgarian presidency, Bosnia and Herzegovina, will receive the long-awaited call for EU membership. Borisov, on his part, said that Bulgaria prioritises the integration of the Western Balkans during its presidency. In his words, "the rare chance of three friendly countries in the region" presiding over the EU Council next year - Bulgaria, Austria and Romania - is afoot. Borisov recalled the lessons of the past and the conflicts in the region, pointing out that "any return to the near past of the Balkans would kill any prospects for the region."

In October Albania recognized the existence of a Bulgarian national minority in the country after a decision by the country's parliament. No Bulgarian national minority had been included in the preliminary draft of the Minori-

ties Act in Albania. For this reason the Bulgarian Prime Minister held a telephone conversation with his Albanian counterpart, Edi Rama, who promised that the Bulgarian minority would be included in the bill. According to unofficial data, about 50,000 Bulgarians live in Albania. The government has reported this positive news as a success for Bulgaria. Prime Minister Borissov called this “an historic breakthrough”, adding that the government has made extraordinary diplomatic efforts in bringing about the triumph of this historic justice.

At the end of November, the governments of Bulgaria and Macedonia held a joint meeting in Strumica, Macedonia, as a continuation of the signed Neighborhood Agreement in the summer. This was yet more proof that the dialogue between Bulgaria and Macedonia has acquired new real dimensions of friendship and good neighborliness after the government in Skopje was headed by Zoran Zaev. The topics discussed by the two cabinets were related to the Bulgarian support for the European integration of the countries of the Western Balkans, the development of infrastructure and the improvement of connectivity - transport, digital, telecommunications. Specific cooperation projects in the field of defense and tourism were also discussed. Corridor 8, connecting the Black Sea and the Adriatic Sea, passing through the territories of Bulgaria, Macedonia and Albania, was once again prioritized. Prime Minister Borisov said that interest in financing this project is growing and that if the work was intensive it could be realized in shorter terms. It is expected that the Neighborhood Agreement between Bulgaria and Macedonia will be ratified by the Macedonian Parliament in December.

At the end of November Prime Minister Boyko Borisov and his governmental delegation took part in the Sixth Meeting of Heads of State and Government of the countries of

Central and Eastern Europe and China (CEEC) in Budapest. The 16 + 1 Forum aims at deepening trade and economic cooperation between participating countries and promoting bilateral and multilateral partnerships. Prime Minister Borisov said Bulgaria could rely on Chinese investments in the construction of the Hemus and Black Sea motorways, as well as the railway line from Rousse to Varna. Other opportunities for cooperation are in the areas of energy, agriculture, industrial zones, e-commerce, innovation and medicine. According to Borisov, the realization of projects in these areas will lead to the opening of new labor markets, raising life expectancy and a new boost to economic growth. The Bulgarian government is ready to actively cooperate on clearly defined and mutually beneficial conditions for both sides.

At the end of November, a government delegation headed by Prime Minister Boyko Borisov visited Riyadh. This was the first time in the history of the bilateral relations between Bulgaria and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia that a visit at such a high level had taken place. The purpose of the visit was to strengthen economic and trade cooperation between the two countries, with discussion of issues in key areas such as security, energy, trade, transport and tourism. The government delegation also included former Prime Minister Simeon Saxe-Coburg Gotha, well-known in the Saudi Royal Court. As a success of the visit, Borisov acknowledged the declared intention of the Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to assist in Saudi investments in Bulgaria. Borisov announced that within one month Bulgaria will open an embassy in Riyadh.

During the visit an agreement was signed to establish a Bulgarian-Saudi Joint Intergovernmental Commission for Economic Cooperation. The Commission will be composed

of representatives of the Bulgarian and Saudi countries. It will meet once a year and the Co-Presidents will negotiate the agenda for the meeting in advance. The Commission will identify new opportunities for cooperation and improvement of the working environment between the business organizations of both countries. An agreement to avoid double taxation between the two countries was also signed.

As from December 1st, this year visas for Bulgarian citizens for Canada are no longer necessary for the purposes of tourism, business or visiting. The length of the authorized stay for a visa-free journey may be up to 6 months and is determined by the Canadian border authorities upon entry into the country. The new rules do not affect those who want to work or study in the country.

### **1.3. Refugee crisis**

The issue of refugees and security along the Bulgarian-Turkish border has become an “apple of discord” between those in power and the opposition. The reason for this was the broadcast of the journalist Elena Yoncheva, who is also a member of BSP. The film shows refugees using a ladder to jump over the fence along the border, which, according to Yoncheva, is a common practice, facilitated by corruption among the border police authorities in the country, witnessed by people inside. Yoncheva also showed pictures in which it is apparent that the fence is destroyed in some places. Those in power admitted that in fact the fence could be jumped, but stated that its purpose is to slow down and hinder refugees. They defined Yoncheva’s film as manipulative and not revealing the objective situation on the border. The facts, according to them, are clear - the flow of migrants to Bulgaria has been minimized. According to the opposition, corruption among the Bulgarian border guards is one

reason why the country cannot yet become a member of the Schengen area.

At the beginning of November, the Chairperson of the State Agency for Refugees, Petya Parvanova, presented a report showing that the number of third-country nationals seeking protection in Bulgaria is a fifth of what it was last year and the number of refusals to grant refugee status has doubled. Refugee accommodation centers are currently under 20% of their full capacity.

## **2. State and development of major political parties**

### **2.1. Social Democratic and other left-centrist parties**

#### **2.1.1. BSP**

##### **2.1.1.1. Condition**

In recent months BSP has increased its opposition behavior, exacerbating the domestic political situation in the country. Almost daily acrimonious exchanges between representatives of BSP and GERB, which have sometimes exceeded the limits of good tone, can be heard. Inside the organization, opposition criticism in the party continued throughout this quarter. This was one of the reasons why, upon an initiative of Kornelia Ninova, a party congress was convened after a decision by the National Council. The decision to hold a congress was voted for with a narrow margin - 63 of the members of the National Council supported the request of Ninova and 57 voted against. The internal opposition saw in this attempt of Ninova to consolidate her influence. According to one of the critics in BSP, Angel Naydenov, this is a kind of demonstration of the party leader, calling for convening a congressional meeting at the drop of a hat, even more so that no essential questions would be

considered. Adoption of an alternative budget and a position on the priorities of the Bulgarian Presidency are issues that can be considered in the National Council of the Party. Particularly critical on the eve of the congress was Rumen Ovcharov, who said that Ninova did not comply with the opinion of the other members of the party but only with the opinion of a number of people. According to Ovcharov, a leader who has set out to remove GERB from power should unite, not split the party. According to Ovcharov, Ninova constantly opens new fronts, which will create additional problems for her in the future.

The BSP Congress was held at the end of October. In an extremely cutting speech to Congress delegates, Ninova criticized the internal opposition in the Party and the country's model of governance. In the actions of the internal opposition in BSP, Ninova saw an attempt by GERB to break the party from within, "because it cannot feed and tame the opposition in parliament, as it has done so far." In front of delegates of the congress, Ninova spoke about nine people in the party, who constantly criticize not only her actions but also the decisions of the party congress and plenum. One of the reasons for this is the changes to the statutes, because of which they can no longer be members of parliament or members of the Executive Bureau. Ninova did not name names, but among the critics are the former BSP leader Mikhail Mikov, Yanaki Stoilov, Atanas Merdzhanov, Angel Naydenov, Dimitar Dabov, Georgi Bozhinov, Georgi Gergov, Krassimir Yankov and Rumen Ovcharov.

According to Ninova, attacks on the party have intensified because BSP has shown that it can be a real alternative to the model of the parallel state, a model personified by GERB. She added that her critics wanted to change the direction of the party by changing the leader.

Ninova urged the opposition in the party to take part in a debate on the issues it considered important. Only Atanas Merdzhanov took into account the criticism of Ninova, pointing out that if nine people are "a problem for BSP and prevent it from removing GERB from power, let this problem be resolved." Merdzhanov said he does not feel offended that he is not a member of parliament and will always work and strive to be useful to the party.

Cornelia Ninova stated that she would not want a vote of confidence from congress, as was the speculation before it started. She said she was not afraid of an election of leader that she would win convincingly, but such a move would delay the pace of work within the party.

In her political speech, Cornelia Ninova called on BSP to fight the "modern slavery of GERB," which "had chained the people" and even restricted the freedom to ask questions in parliament. She asked the delegates to decide that the BSP parliamentary group for Bulgaria would start talks with other parties for the introduction of a vote of no confidence in the government.

At the beginning of the congress, the internal opposition tried to put a point on the agenda for changes in the party's constitution regarding the election of a party leader to be held at the party congress. This proposal was dropped after the delegates voted, because it was supported by only 149 people, 397 were against, and 45 abstained. Later in his speech MEP Georgi Pirinski brought to Ninova's attention that it could be seen from this vote that internal opposition was not limited to nine people, and advised her not to consider her fellow party members who have different positions as "enemies with a party ticket".



At the Congress, BSP claimed it was an alternative that would fight to tackle poverty by introducing progressive income taxation; tackling illiteracy by abolishing the principle that “the money goes where the student is” in funding schools, as well as better health, by ending the practice of hospitals being commercial companies.

Following the decision of the congress to initiate a vote of no confidence in the government, BSP started consultations with the parliamentary groups MRF and “Volya”. BSP proposed the lack of results in the fight against corruption as the topic of voting, but MRF said a vote of no confidence could also be called for other reasons. The parliamentary group of “Volya” said it would not support a vote of no confidence. This means that BSP will only be able to rely on the support of MRF, which will not be enough to overthrow the government. GERB has identified the BSP decision to demand a no-confidence vote as “an attempt to hinder the work of the government,” which will not lead to anything of significance.

Prof. Ivo Hristov, MP from the BSP, was the cause of a negative public reaction, after saying that “80% of Bulgarian citizens are dying.” This gave a new reason for exacerbating tensions between those in power and the opposition. MPs from the ruling majority and from “Volya” called for his resignation. BSP said that such qualifications were inadmissible, and then Ivo Hristov apologized.

### **2.1.1.2. Recommendations**

BSP must continue with its active opposition activity, which has yielded results in recent months. The Party must also rely on developing alternative policies in the future to show a new face of a modern Social Democratic Party. In this process all the expert

resources in the party should be used. On the other hand, ways must be found to stop internal party conflicts and tensions.

## **2.1.2. ABV and Movement 21**

### **2.1.2.1. Condition**

In the past quarter, there were no significant internal, party, organizational or personal events related to ABV and Movement 21. ABV’s position on the renewed discussion by the government on the Belene NPP project will be remembered. The former ABV leader and president of the country in the period 2002-2012, Georgi Parvanov, welcomed the resumption of the debate. In his words, the country needs new nuclear power. According to him, GERB are indebted in this regard, because several years ago they stopped the construction of Belene NPP, from which the country suffered significant financial losses after losing the Rosatom arbitration case. According to Parvanov, things are still fixable if an investor is actually found and the project is realized.

### **2.1.2.2. Recommendations**

ABV and Movement 21 should intensify their activity on an intraparty basis, focusing on the work of local structures. It would have a positive effect if there were political positions and declarations on a wide range of topics, which were articulated in the media. Such things are missing at the moment. It is also necessary to activate dialogue with other related formations in the left and center space.

## **2.1.3. Party “Bulgarian Social Democrats”**

### **2.1.3.1. Condition**

Also during this quarter there is no information about party life in this party.

### **2.1.3.2. Recommendations**

The recommendations remain the same

as in the previous quarter: the party needs to re-establish its internal party activity and strengthen its media presence.

## 2.2. Right-centrist parties

### 2.2.1. GERB

In the past quarter scandals continued with GERB representatives and the party suffered several strong political setbacks. In addition to the resignation of the National Assembly Speaker Dimitar Glavchev and the Minister of Health Prof. Nikolay Petrov, two MPs from GERB were at the center of political scandals.

At the beginning of October, the name of MP Delyan Dobrev was mixed up in a scandal involving a network of clientelistic practices in the municipality of Haskovo, the district from which he was elected a Member of Parliament. BSP MP Elena Yoncheva has provided information showing that people from Dobrev's friendly circle, the husband of his cousin and the male witness at his wedding hold key positions in the municipality. From the information provided by Yoncheva it became clear that companies close to Delyan Dobrev have won public contracts for millions of leva for road maintenance and repair. As a result of the scandal, Delyan Dobrev resigned as a member of parliament, but this was rejected by a vote of his fellow party members. Dobrev said he had done nothing wrong or illegal, and will sue Elena Yoncheva for slander.

This was not to be the fate of another member of the GERB - Anton Todorov. Only a few years ago he was one of GERB's most prominent critics, even writing the book "Shayka ('Gang' in Bulgarian): Boyko, Rosen, Tsetso and Others". In his book, Todorov claims he has chosen the word "shayka" ('gang') because it is "a group of people united for criminal purposes", and it best describes the GERB party and its government. But from a GERB critic,

Todorov has become one of the party's public speakers. This metamorphosis has given rise to numerous critical comments about him and about the party that puts him in an eligible place on its lists. In October, it became clear that GERB intends to put Todorov forward as chair of the Commission for Files. This news has led to a strong public reaction. Intellectuals and public figures wrote an open letter in which they spoke out against Todorov's candidacy. The opposition were also against this proposal. The turbulent public reaction led GERB to withdraw this proposal. A few days later, during an interview in the "Morning Block" on Nova Televisia, Anton Todorov allowed himself to retort to the presenter Viktor Nikolaev that the same thing would happen to him as to his colleague Anna Tsoleva, who had recently been removed from the air. The question of whether the decision to negotiate with Gripen for fighters was taken by "a gang that wants to take 1.5 billion leva," intimidated Todorov and led to his reply: "Very strong words you are using, they'll eat up all your bread. They've already eaten your colleague's bread - and she had started off a little in some direction, but it looks to me like her chair is missing."

This led to turbulent political and public reactions that lasted for several days. In the end, Anton Todorov resigned as a Member of Parliament. He said he would continue working for the party, and even got a post at the GERB headquarters, where he would be a political and media advisor.

At the end of November, GERB held the Party's Fourth Regular Election-Selected National Assembly. The GERB executive party forum unanimously re-elected Boyko Borissov as party leader. The three vice-presidents of GERB - Tsvetan Tsvetanov, Yordanka Fandakova and Dimitar Nikolov were reelected. The remaining members of the Executive Committee

who preserved their positions are: MPs Krasi-mir Velchev and Menda Stoyanova, Deputy Prime Minister Tomislav Donchev, Rumyana Bachvarova, who is the head of the Cabinet of the Prime Minister, Plamen Nunev and the Mayor of Stara Zagora, Zhivko Todorov. The only change in the Party's Executive Committee is the entry of the Chair of the Healthcare Commission at the National Assembly, Daniela Daritkova, who took over the post of Justice Minister Tsetska Tsacheva. Dimitar Glavchev, who resigned as chairman of the National Assembly, was elected chairman of the party's control committee.

At the GERB forum, a special declaration was accepted that they would never co-operate with BSP. The main reason for this was GERB's desire to stop speculation on the subject, especially after Cornelia Ninova said that circles in the BSP around the businessman Georgi Gergov have demanded a coalition between the two parties after the elections. The declaration was accepted with 1079 votes in favor and 1 abstention.

Borisov stated that GERB looks at the raising of the issue of a coalition between GERB and BSP "above all as a search for an occasion for internal party clearance of bills in the BSP itself to cope with political dissatisfaction and the tension among its party members." The GERB leader criticized Cornelia Ninova, who, in his words, "has caused extraordinary and revolutionary situations" that lead to internal party tensions. Borisov reminded people that, at the beginning of the work of the 44th National Assembly, they offered the chairmanship of parliament to BSP to show a statesman-like approach and nationally responsible behavior with regard to the upcoming Bulgarian presidency of the Council of the EU.

In a report on the work of the Executive Commission before the delegates of the fo-

rum, the chairman of the GERB parliamentary group, Tsvetan Tsvetanov, said that over the last 3 years the membership of the party has increased by 10,000 and it currently has 93,506 members and another 2,000 have entered the youth movement. Tsvetanov also reported the support of the Konrad Adenauer and Hans Seidel foundations for the activities of the women's movement in the party and its youth organization.

Tsvetanov also made note of the good performance of GERB in the mixed regions of the country over recent years and expressed the confidence that, in the local elections in 2019, they would also have the first mayors of municipalities in the Kurdjali district. In his words, the strength of the GERB parliamentary group makes it possible to have a successful 4-year term of the GERB government and the United Patriots.

### 2.2.2. Reformist block

The "Movement of Bulgaria of the Citizens" (DBG), one of the parties in the Reformist Block, unanimously elected Dimitar Delchev as its new chairman. After the resignation of Meglena Kuneva, Delchev served as party leader until the national conference of the party, which by statute has the right to elect a legitimate chair. The new DBG leader was born in 1984. He is a lawyer, having graduated in law from the University of Sofia, and holds a degree in English and European Law from Cambridge University, and a Master's degree in Management and Business Administration at the American University in Bulgaria. As early as in 2011, Dimitar Delchev was an adviser to Meglena Kuneva's campaign as an independent candidate for president of the Republic of Bulgaria. In the following year he became a co-founder of the political party "Movement of Bulgaria of the Citizens". In 2014, Delchev

took the oath as a member of the 43rd National Assembly, and at the moment he is deputy chairman of the “Movement of Bulgaria of the Citizens”.

Dimitar Delchev said that the main goal for the DBG is to build a strong anti-GERB coalition to stop the stalemate in the country. According to the new party leader, early elections are inevitable, so the DBG needs to start intensive preparations for them right now. According to him, “the DBG should be ready to break the feudal control of GERB, both locally and nationally,” and this will be achieved through a broad unification of democratically thinking Bulgarian citizens, parties and organizations.

At the end of November, the party of former Defense Minister Nikolay Nenchev - BZNS left the Reformist Block and joined the other camp on the right - that of DSB and “Yes, Bulgaria”. However, another agricultural unit - the United Agrarians, led by Petya Stavreva and as honorary chairman, the founder of the party Anastasia Mozer, joined the Reform Party. Petya Stavreva was an MEP elected from the list of GERB in 2007. In the 2009 elections she was on the Blue Coalition’s list.

### 2.2.3. DSB

In the past months, DSB increased the dialogue with “Yes, Bulgaria” as a result of the lessons learned from the March elections, in which the two formations appeared on their own and stayed outside parliament. This dialogue can be seen as the initial phase of a future union. A step in this direction is the “Bulgarian Manifesto for Europe” initiative, which launches a public discussion on the writing of a platform that will form the basis of a new right-wing reunion. The initiative included four right-wing parties: DSB, “Yes, Bulgaria”, “the Greens” and DEOS.

At the event, MEP Svetoslav Malinov, a

member of the DSB leadership, mentioned that Bulgaria is the only country in which, after joining the European Union, there has been a dramatic deterioration in the indicators on the rule of law, democracy, human rights and even the holding of democratic elections. Stefan Tafrov, a member of “Yes, Bulgaria” and a former Bulgarian ambassador to the United Nations, said the manifesto team faced “a collective intellectual and political effort.” In his words, the main driving force that pushes society forward is “the just wrath of the citizens.” According to Tafrov, this is not enough, however, and courage and an action plan are needed.

In his speech, the leader of the “Yes, Bulgaria” Movement Hristo Ivanov shared that the platform upon which their ideas are based is aimed at bringing back the feeling of the European direction of Bulgaria. DSB leader Atanas Atanasov stressed that even when DSB was established, the main slogan of the party was “For a Strong Bulgaria in a United Europe”. According to him 10 years after Bulgaria’s EU membership “neither is Europe united enough nor is Bulgaria strong.” This means that the main cause of the party remains unachieved.

According to the manifesto, “Bulgaria is a poor, corrupt, weak state institution.” Priorities include education and health, as well as active participation of the country in the European agenda.

### 2.2.4. Yes, Bulgaria

“Yes, Bulgaria” will be one of the main formations of the new unification on the right, which is also evident in the organized “Bulgarian Manifesto for Europe” initiative, mentioned above. In recent months, the party led by former Justice Minister Hristo Ivanov has been actively working on building local party structures. The main goal of the party is to prepare for the local elections in 2019, so building local

organizations on the territory of the country is a priority task. In the past quarter “Yes, Bulgaria” has been involved in several noteworthy initiatives. For example, the party declared itself against the idea of building a Belene NPP. At the end of November, “Yes, Bulgaria” called for the establishment of a parliamentary committee of inquiry to verify allegations that information was sent to Interpol by the Turkish authorities, who accused Bulgartabac of cigarette smuggling in Turkey and the Middle East.

The European Commission’s Co-operation and Assessment Report was assessed by “Yes, Bulgaria” as a major failure for the government. This is more proof that GERB is unwilling and unable to conduct a real fight against corruption, because this is a topic that would undermine the foundation of their governance - namely corruption.

## **2.3. Centrist parties**

### **2.3.1. MRF**

In early November, the Central Council of MRF decided to launch an intensive “dismantling” policy with the participation of nationalists. For the realization of this objective, MRF will use all permitted democratic, political and parliamentary means, including votes of no-confidence in the government.

MRF leader Mustafa Karadayi said that “the participation of nationalists in power is a slap in the democratic face of Bulgaria, threatening the stability of the country.” In his words, the language of hatred and aggression is in power, with GERB imitating nationalists in their behavior and rhetoric. According to him, democracy and stability in the country are under threat and this requires urgent action. Karadayi added that reforming governance is a must, even if this means early elections. In his words, the European presidency cannot be an alibi for any government, much less for power with the par-

ticipation of nationalists. The Central Council of the MRF commissioned the political leadership of the party to place on the agenda of the annual meeting of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats in Europe, the topic of the place and the future of the Balkans according to the model of the Bulgarian ethnic model, the transformation of Europe, the Balkans and Bulgaria into an area, free of nationalism and radicalism.

### **2.3.2. DOST**

At the beginning of November, in an open letter distributed to the media, the party DOST demanded the recognition of a Turkish minority in Bulgaria. The reason for the request of DOST was the recognition of a Bulgarian minority in Albania, which was unanimously accepted in the country as a great success for Bulgarian diplomacy. DOST leader Lyutvi Mestan called for double standards in Bulgarian politics to be terminated, and for this issue, which is so important for Bulgarian citizens of Turkish origin, to be discussed. The Bulgarian Constitution does not recognize national minorities and group rights by adopting the principle that all citizens have equal individual rights. Many politicians have identified Mestan’s request as a provocation, some even called on the Prosecutor General to take the initiative, in order that criminal responsibility for Lyutvi Mestan could be called for.

### **2.3.3. “Volya”**

Also during this quarter, the parliamentary group of the “Volya” Party will be remembered for incoherent political behavior. After the beginning of the new political season in September, “Volya” first spoke of a vote of no confidence in the government, two months later when BSP opened talks with other parliamentary groups to initiate such a vote, “Volya”

said that they would not support it. Party leader Veselin Mareski said the MPs in his party would abstain. He added that they did not want to join the BSP game in order to “tag onto” them without justification, since only they had not been in government in recent years, and so they see themselves as the only alternative to the status quo.

In November, Veselin Mareshki was accused by the head of Lukoil Bulgaria Valentin Zlatev of dumping fuel sales, which was referred to the Commission for the Protection of Competition. Zlatev also said that there was a “political umbrella” over Mareshki in order for him to be able to carry out his activities undisturbed. Mareshki dismissed the attacks by saying that he is constantly inspected by the control authorities and so far no violations have been detected. In turn, the leader of “Volya” accused Lukoil of underpinning the fuel cartel. And the attacks on him, in his estimation, are due to his struggle with cartels, which are not appreciated by Valentin Zlatev and those in power.

“Volya” has embarked on yet another unconventional move from the point of view of political PR with the stated intention of Veselin Mareshki that his parliamentary group would not enter parliament, except to vote on the budget, unless Prof. Ivo Hristov from BSP resigned because of his statement that “80% of Bulgarians are imbeciles.”

## **2.4. Nationalist parties**

### **2.4.1. United Patriots**

At the end of October, Deputy Prime Minister and NFSB leader Valeri Simeonov was convicted by the Bourgas District Court of using hate speech. This refers to his statement from the floor of Parliament in December 2014, in which he announced that the Roma have become “impudent, cocky and dishonest human-

like beings, demanding a salary without doing any work, demanding sickness benefits without being ill, child benefit for children who play with pigs in the street, and maternity benefits for women with the instincts of street bitches.” The case for this speech was filed by Roma journalists Kremena Budinova and Ognyan Isaev, who were represented before the court by the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee (BHC).

The Bourgas District Court ruled that Valeri Simeonov’s statement was “harassment” under the Protection against Discrimination Act.

Simeonov has been ordered to desist from such violation, and to refrain from such utterances in the future. At present he is the chair of the National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Issues. Valeri Simeonov said he would appeal against the decision to a higher instance.

In mid-November, the relationship between the coalition partners GERB and the United Patriots was exacerbated once again. The reason for this was the resignation of the Speaker of the National Assembly Dimitar Glavchev. Valeri Simeonov accused Prime Minister Borisov of staying in politics as a sole leader. According to the NFSB leader, the resignation of Glavchev was the prime minister’s own decision. In his words, it is unacceptable in a coalition government that the lesser partner should learn about the resignation from the media, without this being discussed in the coalition. According to Simeonov, this is a gaffe that gives the opposition the opportunity to speak of a single-person government and disrespect for parliamentarism, claims that are becoming more and more difficult to contest after Borisov’s action.

Simeonov is of the opinion that the GERB parliamentary group is very dissatisfied with the behavior of Boyko Borisov, which further and unnecessarily exacerbates tensions

among the ruling parties. He urged Borisov to heed his coalition partner, otherwise they could rethink their participation in the cabinet.

Valeri Simeonov said that for six months the government has done a lot of work and the results are visible - economic growth, active foreign policy, and stopping the refugee pressure after the construction of the fence. He says there is no alternative to current governance because the BSP and the MRF cannot be such, and the United Patriots will do their utmost for the coalition to persevere, but not at all costs.

At the end of October, the NFSB held the third regular party congress, which unanimously re-elected Valeri Simeonov as chairman. 147 delegates voted "for", with none against or abstaining. The leadership of NFSB retained its composition after the delegates unanimously re-elected Dancho Hadjiev and the MPs Valentin Kasabov and Boris Yachev as deputy chairmen of the party.

A youth structure of the NFSB was created with a change in the party's statutes, in view of the increase of the number of young people in the party. Among other changes in the statutes are the introduction of the position of national coordinator, as well as the change of mandate of the Congress from 3 to 4 years.

## **2.5. Positions of Parties on Foreign and European Policy**

At the end of November, the National Assembly voted in favor of the draft for the Bulgarian Program for the Presidency of the EU Council, with 154 MPs supporting the position, none were against, and 15 MPs abstained. The decision states that the National Assembly expresses support in principle for the declared priorities in the draft Program of the Presidency, sharing the main messages on consensus, competitiveness and cohesion, as well as the

motto "United We Stand Strong".

The decision focuses on preserving cohesion policy as one of the main instruments for achieving economic growth and a fair distribution of funds between Member States. Strengthening the Common Agricultural Policy is defined as a strong and adequately funded Community policy to ensure the sustainable development of this important sector of the European economy.

Other key issues underlying the decision are defense, security and migration. Parliament calls for an agreement on finalizing the reform of the Common European Asylum System, including the adoption of a revised Dublin Regulation, focusing on the implementation of targeted measures to prevent illegal migration and trafficking in people. The fight against organized crime and terrorism has been brought to the fore by ensuring better interaction and exchange of information and data between national security services, and the adoption of a new legal framework for the functioning of the Schengen Information System. Attention is also drawn to Bulgaria's active role in enhancing cooperation and developing an effective common defense policy to enhance the security of the Union and its citizens.

MPs insist that ministers inform the relevant parliamentary committees on progress in implementing the priorities of the Bulgarian presidency and that the results of European Council meetings should be presented to the National Assembly.

In the past quarter, GERB has focused its efforts on supporting the government in preparing for the presidency, as well as supporting the cabinet's foreign policy initiatives.

BSP President Kornelia Ninova met with the President of the European Parliament Antonio Tajani during his visit to Sofia. She introduced Tajani to the vision of the Socialists about the

future of Europe and the place of Bulgaria in it, and presented him with a document entitled “More Social Europe in the People’s Interest”, which was co-produced with the Socialist and Democrat Group in the EP and PES. In it five main priorities are outlined:

1. The EU - A Comprehensive Social Union. The main focus is on the rights of European citizens, as opposed to the interests of corporations. Here the right to work, access to education, and quality health care should become leading goals of the European Union.

2. Bulgaria at the core rather than the periphery of the EU - a clear strategy and consistent state efforts to join Schengen; equal participation of Bulgaria in defense and security policies.

3. Bulgaria - an active participant, not a passive listener on the European scene. Future common decisions in the Union should take into account the national interests of individual Member States.

4. The EU in which cohesion policy is an expression of solidarity and the elimination of inequalities between Member States.

5. The EU in which the Western Balkans have a clear European perspective and the Black Sea region is the centerpiece of the EU’s efforts in the field of environment, security and other areas of partnership with the countries of the region.

At the end of November at a meeting of the Socialist International Council held in Barcelona, the BSP leader, who is also the vice president of the organization, said the left should defend the thesis that “the EU can only be effective if it has a social agenda, based on solidarity and geared to tackling inequalities and guaranteeing equal rights for all Europeans.”

At the end of November MRF made a proposal during the Bulgarian Presidency to draft a document in the EU Council in support of

democratic processes in Turkey and the continuation of negotiations between the country and the EU.

### 3. Public opinion

Research by the public opinion center Trend, conducted in early November, shows that, according to electoral attitudes, GERB continues to be the leader. 21.2% of voters would vote for the ruling party. BSP remains second with the support of 17.8% of citizens. They are followed by DPS with 6.3% and United Patriots with 5.4%. Veselin Mareshki’s “Volya” party shows the most serious ebb of confidence: 1.8% of voters would vote for the party, which does not give it a chance of entering parliament. The reformist bloc (1.8%), “Yes, Bulgaria” (1.4%) and DSB (1.1%) show low levels of support.

32 per cent of the respondents express trust in the government. 46% believe that the Cabinet will have a full mandate, while 32% are pessimists. 52% are optimistic about Bulgaria’s development, while 39% are of the opposite opinion.

President Rumen Radev enjoys the widest public approval: 67%. After him comes Prime Minister Boyko Borisov, liked by 42 per cent of respondents.

### 4. Basic conclusions and forecasts

1. At the end of 2017 political tensions in the country intensified. The reasons for this are the increased confrontation between GERB and BSP, which led to a series of scandals, resignations and mutual accusations. All this could have a negative impact on Bulgaria’s presidency of the EU Council, starting on January 1 2018. The successful holding of the presidency is a major goal of the government and the ruling majority. This is largely due to the foreign policy activity of the government,



especially with regard to Balkan politics, which will be one of the main points of focus during the Bulgarian presidency. Although there is some tension between GERB and the United Patriots, the coalition remains stable.

2. In recent months BSP has proved that there may be an active opposition. In addition to developing alternative policies, the party exposed a number of irregularities that pushed GERB into an explanatory regime and even became a cause for resignation among the ruling party. However, the tension between BSP leader Kornelia Ninova and the opposition in the party, which was also seen at the congress that was held, continues in an internal party plan. Although Ninova has consolidated her leadership position, balance in the party seems fragile, and in the first major political tremor, the opposition may seek revenge.

3. The parties on the left that are not in parliament have a low public presence during this quarter as well. ABV and Movement 21 have occasional public appearances, while the “Bulgarian Social Democrats” party lacks any political activity. This raises the question of what their political future is to be. Next year there will probably be some activation in view of the upcoming local elections in 2019, with the possibility of new coalitions of the smaller parties on the left. Dialogue with BSP is practically absent, and the reasons for this can be found to an equal extent on both sides. In the last parliamentary elections, the new BSP leadership rethought its coalition policy, and in the future will probably follow a line of fewer compromises and coalitions with parties with insignificant electoral influence.

4. GERB has suffered several serious political blows in recent months. They showed that the party is vulnerable to pressure from the opposition, especially when it is a matter of errors or irregularities committed by its rep-

resentatives. The resignation of the President of the National Assembly, the second most important figure in the state hierarchy after the president, is without doubt a serious political loss. The GERB scandals at this stage are quickly quenched by resignation, but the party risks finding itself in a spiral of tremors that could destabilize it internally.

5. The extra-parliamentary right in the face of DSB and “Yes, Bulgaria”, along with other centrist formations like the Greens and the DEOS, started a reunification process with the launch of the initiative “Bulgarian Manifesto for Europe”. The main purpose of these formations is to become a true right-wing alternative to GERB, although at this stage sociological surveys show low electoral support insufficient to overcome the electoral barrier. The Reformist Block also claims to be the driving force behind a new right-wing union. At least for the time being, the two projects on the right – “Yes, Bulgaria” and DSB and the Reformist Block - are developing independently, since the dividing lines that led to the breakup of the Reformist Block within the previous National Assembly remain.

6. The MRF took the decision to dismantle the government with the use of the entire toolkit of democratic political means. The party stated that it is unacceptable for nationalists to take part in the country’s leadership during its presidency of the Council of the EU, with the outcome being the formation of a new government within the 44th National Assembly or early elections. It has become apparent that the MRF is willing to support the GERB minority cabinet, a position that they assumed after the March elections. The DPS competitor for the votes in the mixed regions of the country - DOST has asked Bulgaria to recognize the presence of a Turkish minority in the country. This could be seen as an attempt at provoca-

tion, but also as a “gauntlet cast down” to the MRF, which does not accept the topicality of such an idea.

7. “Volya” show inconsistency in their political behavior. After the party leader Vesselin Mareshki first spoke at the beginning of September of casting a vote of no confidence in the government, recently “Volya” stated they would not support the request of the BSP. Although they are the smallest parliamentary group, “Volya” can tip the scales in key votes in the National Assembly. For this reason, this constant manoeuvring between the ruling party and the opposition could be explained as an attempt to “increase the price” for the larger

parliamentary players.

8. The united patriots at this stage seem to be coherent and united, despite some apparent nuances of their leaders’ views on certain issues, especially with regard to the coalition policy with GERB. The most extreme in the assessment is the leader of the National Front for Salvation of Bulgaria, Valeri Simeonov, who has already raised the issue of dialogue problems in the ruling coalition several times. These contradictions, however, are rather the fruit of released tensions, not systemic contradictions on substantial political issues and do not jeopardize the integrity of the government.

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