

DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

POLIT-BAROMETER

Year 20 Issue 6
July-August 2020

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Bulgaria has entered a period of political crisis and the protests, which are in their second month, seem set to intensify at the beginning of September.



The move with the project for a new constitution is an attempt to gain time because Prime Minister Borisov will not get the 160 votes required in the National Assembly to take the step of convening a Grand National Assembly.



Opinion polls indicate a fragmented parliament for the next election, with declining support for GERB.

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1

THE POLITICAL SITUATION

In July and August there were large-scale anti-government protests demanding the resignation of the government and the chief prosecutor. The country has fallen into a political crisis, the outcome of which remains unclear. The direct reason for the protests was the storming of the president's office with heavily armed employees from the "Bureau of Defence" of the chief prosecutor, who searched the offices of presidential advisers. This unprecedented demonstration against the presidential institution prompted thousands of Bulgarians to assemble in front of the presidency that evening to defend democracy. This marked the beginning of daily protests that still continue.

The day before the storming of the presidency, another incident drew public attention. The leader of the "Yes, Bulgaria" party, Hristo Ivanov, tried to reach the beach near Rosenets to once again raise the issue of the legality of the mansion of the MRF honorary leader Ahmed Dogan, which makes access to the beach and to the municipal road impossible. Ivanov reached the beach by sea and was pushed into the water by Dogan's bodyguards from the National Security Service. The next day, President Radev issued a statement confirming that they were NSS employees. Radev said that according to him, Dogan and the MRF MP and oligarch Peevski should not have state security, but this depends on Prime Minister Borisov, because in the commission that makes the decision, the head of SANS and the Interior Minister, who are subordinate to the government, have a majority. Under pressure from public opinion, Dogan and Peevski forewent state security.

After the raiding of the presidency, President Radev joined the protesters and demanded the resignation of the government and the chief prosecutor. The president said the country had been engulfed by the mafia, and that citizens needed to win it back.

It is mainly young Bulgarians who take part in the protests - the generation of 20 to 30-year-olds, and these are people regardless of party colours - left, right, liberals, greens or people without party orientation. Tens of thousands of citizens have been gathering every night for more than 50 days. They want the resignation of Prime Minister Borisov and chief prosecutor Geshev, who they say serves mafia circles. According to them, democracy in Bulgaria is threatened by massive corruption and the conquest of

the country by the oligarchy and mafia circles and what is needed is a change in the country's government, led for more than 10 years by the GERB party and its leader Boyko Borisov. Protests are taking place not only in Sofia, but also in a number of other cities in the country. There are protests in dozens of cities in Europe and North America. Bulgarians protested in front of the headquarters of the Christian Democratic Union in Berlin and in front of the chancellery. There was a protest in front of the US Embassy in Sofia and the German Embassy. The protest in front of the German embassy was one of "closed eyes", calling on Chancellor Angela Merkel not to close her eyes and to take a position on what is happening in Bulgaria and also on her partner in the EPP, Prime Minister Borisov. The biggest success of the protest is already a fact - the response in the international media. Dozens of authoritative international media publish weekly articles about the country's protests and the corruption that has gripped the country.

In July new recordings discrediting Prime Minister Borisov were released. A video was released from the state residence where he lives, showing the person making the recording opening a drawer containing gold bars and 500-euro banknotes. This video confirmed that the photos that had been published earlier were not Photoshop, something which was proved by experts on the Bivol website. A new recording of Borisov with Deputy Prime Minister Tomislav Donchev was also published, in which the Prime Minister used insulting words addressed to the President. Donchev said he had had many conversations with Borisov but did not recall there being "such exuberant language." Borisov did not comment on the recordings but hinted that they were fake. The president, for his part, said the recording proved who ordered Geshev's attack on him and the raid on the presidency. Despite the inaction of the prosecutor's office, MEP Elena Yoncheva announced that Borisov's first recording of threats against her was authentic. This has been proven by a specialised laboratory in the United States that works for the government. Yoncheva said she had alerted the police in Brussels against Borisov because she had felt threatened.

Also during these months, the chief prosecutor will be remembered for the double standards in his actions and the violation of procedural rules. Chats were published from the personal correspondence between the accused

businessman Plamen Bobokov and the presidential adviser Plamen Uzunov. This is correspondence which is known to the prosecutor's office because the two provided their phones to the investigating authorities themselves. In violation of the Law on Special Intelligence Devices, from such a device the chief prosecutor brought to public attention conversations of the businessman hiding in Dubai Vasil Bozhkov with the journalist and owner of the opposition website frognews.bg Ognyan Stefanov and with the MP and chairman of the Communist Party of Bulgaria Alexander Paunov. The talks focus on the protests and the political situation in the country. The prosecutor's office made the strange statement that this is a crime against the state under Chapter One of the Criminal Code - where such themes as treason, sabotage, etc. are dealt with. Ognyan Stefanov mentions that he talked to Bozhkov as a journalist and insisted on giving him an interview. Alexander Paunov resigned from the BSP-Left Bulgaria parliamentary group after a conversation with Korneliya Ninova. Ninova distanced herself from Paunov and stated that these talks did not involve BSP in any way.

Geshev and the prosecution continue to maintain a passive position about the recordings and photos with the prime minister, saying they will not investigate the contents of the recordings and photos, but only who made them illegally. Although it was announced that Borisov and Finance Minister Goranov had been questioned about Vasil Bozhkov's allegations of racketeering against him, the impression remained that the prosecution was neglecting the case. Although the finance minister has "turned a blind eye" to BGN 700 million, which did not enter the state treasury from fees that Bozhkov had to pay, no charges have yet been filed against him. Nor has there been any action in connection with the scandalous journalistic investigation "the Eight Dwarfs", which is about the robbing of a business and the disappearance of 35 kg. of gold in an investigation by the Specialised Prosecutor's Office. In this case, the names of a former investigator and current prosecutors from the Specialised Prosecutor's Office are involved. Asked by reporters when he would investigate the Eight Dwarfs, chief prosecutor Geshev ironically replied that he would "investigate both the Eight Dwarfs and the ten little Indians," which again provoked the displeasure of his critics, who said Geshev did not have the morals or ethical qualities to hold this responsible position.

In August two long-awaited rulings by the Constitutional Court were issued: one on the immunity of the president at the request of the chief prosecutor, and the other on whether there was a mechanism to investigate the chief prosecutor at the request of the government. With regard to the immunity of the president, it is said that he cannot be prosecuted until the end of his term of office, and cannot be recorded, tracked, searched, etc. With regard to the chief prosecutor, it is said that he can be investigated and charged by an ordinary prosecutor from the Sofia City Prosecutor's Office, in which case the chief prosecutor cannot have any influence. The decision on the immunity of the president confirms that the actions performed by Geshev

with the special intelligence devices revealed by the prosecutor's office in a conversation with the president are illegal.

At the end of July, BSP submitted a new vote of no confidence in the government on the topic of corruption, which, as expected, did not pass. Once again, Borisov did not respect the Bulgarian parliament and did not attend the debates on the vote. Nor was he present during the vote on the government changes which he proposed.

In an attempt to ease political tensions, Borisov replaced four ministers. Those who left their posts were the minister of the interior Mladen Marinov, the minister of tourism Nikolina Angelkova, the minister of finance Vladislav Goranov and the minister of health Kiril Ananiev. Ananiev replaced Goranov as finance minister. Deputy Prime Minister Mariana Nikolova became minister of tourism. The director of the Alexandrovska Hospital, Prof. Kostadin Angelov, was elected the new minister of health, and Hristo Terziiski, up to now the director of the General Directorate of the National Police, was elected minister of the interior. These changes did not alleviate the tensions. The protest categorically stated that they demanded two resignations - of Borisov with the whole government and of the Prosecutor General. At the end of August, the Minister of Justice Danail Kirilov also resigned. The probable reason is the harsh criticism of the draft for a new constitution, the main author of which is considered to be Kirilov.

The protests brought the government to a standstill. Borisov showed confused and contradictory reactions in an attempt to gain time. He stressed that he would not allow early elections and a caretaker government of Rumen Radev. According to Borisov, a functioning parliament is needed to meet the economic challenges posed by the "corona" crisis. In mid-August, BSP attempted to convene an extraordinary session of parliament to hear Borisov, but GERB and the United Patriots boycotted the meeting and there was no quorum.

In mid-August, Boyko Borisov made a surprise move by proposing the convening of a Grand National Assembly and the adoption of an entirely new constitution. According to him, in this way GERB would respond to the demands of the protesters. The draft of GERB, presented a few days later, repeats 95% of the texts in the current constitution, as several chapters have been moved and some new proposals have been made. The preamble of the current constitution, which defines Bulgaria as a "democratic, legal and social state", is dropped, and the chapter on the rights and freedoms of citizens, which is now after the basic principles, has gone right to the end. This met with strong criticism from prominent Bulgarian constitutionalists. GERB's draft envisages reducing the number of MPs from 240 to 120, abolishing the Supreme Judicial Council and creating two separate councils of prosecutors and judges; a reduction of the term of office of the chief prosecutor and the presidents of the two Supreme Courts from 7 to 5 years; abolishing the possibility for the President to participate in the

procedure for the appointment of the chief prosecutor and the presidents of the Supreme Court of Cassation and the Supreme Administrative Court. The draft envisions the Prosecutor General being heard by the National Assembly, which is currently possible, but there is no mention of his accountability or a mechanism for bringing him to justice and his early dismissal - one of the key demands of the protesters. The possibility of filing an individual constitutional complaint is also introduced, although the draft fails to determine citizens as a subject. The strangest and at the same time most difficult thing to understand is the text which stipulates that the Council of Judges and the Council of Prosecutors have the right to initiate legislation. The project presented by GERB met with stormy reactions and criticism from both the legal community and the protesters. The protesters said they did not accept the proposal from a drained and illegitimate parliament. There were similar reactions from all opposition parties behind the protests. President Rumen Radev said it was an attempt by Borisov to cling on to power, but that "the mafia could not reform the judiciary and write a new constitution." Vice President Iliana Yotova described GERB's draft of a new constitution as insulting to lawyers and the Bulgarian people. The leader of "Yes, Bulgaria" Hristo Ivanov defined the idea of a new constitution as a substitution with which the mafia aims to guarantee its power in the future.

According to those in the know, the idea of a new constitution and convening a Grand National Assembly is an attempt by Borisov to buy time. His main goal is to avoid the formation of a caretaker government by the president if there are early elections. This is the principal reason why he does not resign or even look for an option for new governments without his participation in this National Assembly.

On September 2nd, which will be the first working day of the National Assembly after the summer vacation and is when GERB are expected to collect 120 signatures and submit the project, a large national protest will be organised in front of the parliament. This protest has been labelled "the Great People's Uprising". According to some protesters, more than 100,000 people are expected to take part.

The convening of a Grand National Assembly requires first that a constitutional draft be submitted by half of the Members of Parliament (120). Then this draft and the decision to convene a Grand National Assembly is to be considered not earlier than two and not later than five months after that. This is followed by a vote by the MPs for elections to the Grand National Assembly, which must be supported by a majority of 2/3 - 160 votes. GERB stated that they were starting consultations with other parliamentary support forces to gather the 120 signatures needed to submit the project. GERB, together with their coalition partners from IMRO and NFSB, have 116 MPs. BSP have refused to take part in the talks, and MRF, who will take a decision on September 1st, are not expected to support the project.

On August 28th, a closed session will be held in the European Parliament, dedicated to the alarming situation in Bulgaria and the news reaching Brussels about large-scale corruption and protection at the highest level.

The Democracy, Rule of Law and Fundamental Rights Monitoring Group, chaired by Dutch MEP Sophie in 't Veld, has invited Prime Minister Boyko Borisov and Chief Prosecutor Ivan Geshev to a closed session. But they will be substituted by deputy prime minister and foreign minister Ekaterina Zaharieva, deputy chief prosecutor Krassimira Filipova and deputy justice minister Desislava Ahladova.

2

CONDITION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE PARTY SYSTEM

The scandals involving Prime Minister Borisov and anti-government protests have led to an erosion of electoral support for GERB. According to some internal party analysts, the best option for GERB was to resign at the beginning of the protests and have quick elections. Thus, the party could have been preserved electorally, and now it is losing more and more voters. The party is in a defensive position as its representatives are engaged in crisis PR in the pro-government media. The main tactic is to malign the protests, with pro-government propaganda saying they are paid for by oligarch Vasil Bozhkov.

At the beginning of August, Boyko Borisov convened a national meeting of the party elite and local structures with the aim of showing that the party was cohesive and united. However, the event did not achieve the desired effect. The meeting, which lasted only an hour at Sofia Tech Park, will be remembered for the violence against protesters and journalists. It is still not completely clear how the security guards of the event allowed people in unimpeded, who beat protesters that entered the event to demand Borisov's resignation. At the event, Borisov delivered a short speech, which many described as one of his weakest public appearances. In it he stated that he was willing to resign if this would calm the situation, but that he should have this approved by his coalition partners.

At the height of the protests and the publication of another recording of Prime Minister Borisov, in which he used insulting words about the president, the first resignation of an iconic figure in the GERB parliamentary group took place. Dzhema Grozdanova, long-time chairwoman of the parliamentary foreign policy committee, resigned. Her reasons stated that her upbringing, education and life experience no longer allowed her to continue her work in the parliament and she could no longer be useful. Grozdanova was the only representative of GERB who attended the presentation of the annual report of the Euro-Atlantic Centre of the former deputy chairman of GERB, Tsvetan Tsvetanov. She is among Tsvetanov's close associates and a number of observers reckon that she will join his future party project.

In mid-August, Tsvetanov announced that at the end of September he will form a political party called "Republicans for Bulgaria". Tsvetanov increased his criticism of the government and Prime Minister Borisov, saying resignation is

necessary and is the only way out of the crisis. According to him, GERB has become a client organisation, where private interests prevail, and the country has no direction or goal. Tsvetanov said he saw Democratic Bulgaria as future partners. It is not yet clear what the prospects for Tsvetanov's future party are, but it is very possible that it will carve off entire structures from GERB, a process of splitting already observed in a number of regional cities in the country, such as Ruse, Vidin and Veliko Tarnovo. When asked by a journalist how many votes he will receive in the next elections, Tsvetanov gave a very optimistic forecast – saying 500,000, pointing out that this is as many as GERB will have.

BSP has backed the protests since day one. The party supported the demand for the resignation of the government and the chief prosecutor. The actions of the chief prosecutor were long ignored by BSP, but the attack on the president and the violation of the rule of law led to a change in the party's position. However, in the National Council of BSP and among the so-called opposition a more nuanced position is observed. The opposition's attempt to convene the party's plenum was impressive after Korneliya Ninova demanded a vote of no confidence against the cabinet. The feeling remains that the opposition in the party is inclined to compromise with GERB, whereas the leadership in the person of Korneliya Ninova is definitely not in favour of any compromise. Despite the protests and the weakened positions of GERB, at this stage BSP cannot take advantage and strengthen its electoral support. What is more, there is even a decline in support. This is due to the continuing internal contradictions in the party, which must be resolved after the election for party leader, which will be held on September 12th. Victory for Ninova is expected to consolidate the party and increase opposition pressure, which could be a prerequisite for a stronger electoral performance.

BSP categorically rejected GERB's ideas for a new constitution and convening a Grand National Assembly. They stated that it was an attempt to buy time in order for the government and for Borisov personally to stay in power. BSP announced that they would not discuss the proposed changes at all and would not take part in any debate. Debate on constitutional changes could be held only after early parliamentary elections and with a new composition of the National Assembly, in which they are ready to present their views.

Five candidates will stand in the direct elections for party leader on September 12th. In addition to the current leader of the party Korneliya Ninova, other candidates for the post will be - Kiril Dobrev, Krassimir Yankov, Valeri Zhablyanov and Georgi Todorov. Korneliya Ninova has the most nominations - 285, followed by her main opponent for the post Kiril Dobrev - 144, Krassimir Yankov with 55 nominations, and Valeri Zhablyanov with 34. The BSP election campaign began on August 13th. Korneliya Ninova went on leave, according to the provisions of the party statute. The post of chairman of the BSP National Council was temporarily occupied by the mayor of Gotse Delchev, Vladimir Moskov, who is the deputy chairman of the party. In order for a leader to be elected in the first round, they must receive at least half of the actual votes. Otherwise, there will be a second round on September 19th. On December 31st, 2019, the party had 83,848 members, and the exact number of eligible voters will be known on September 10th.

The person indicated as Ninova's main rival, Kiril Dobrev, was attacked by Rumen Ovcharov. The former Minister of Energy in Sergei Stanishev's cabinet was convicted at the first instance in connection with a case of intentional abeyance at the Bobov Dol thermal power plant when he was a minister in the period 2005-2007. On this occasion, Ovcharov declared that the case had been ordered by behind the scenes political manoeuvres in the person of Delyan Peevski and Boyko Borisov. According to him, his sentence is absurd. Ovcharov feels that the reason for this is the fact that it does not allow them to control BSP. According to him, another such attempt is through the candidacy of Kiril Dobrev. Ovcharov stated that Dobrev participated in dozens of companies with surrogates, with which he won public contracts because of his closeness to oligarchic circles around the government. Dobrev denied the allegations and said there were no such companies that were winning public contracts. It seems that with the approach of the election for party leader, the conflict in BSP will intensify.

The United Patriots were particularly insistent on continuing the government's work and were in favour of Borisov not resigning. The Patriots are also experiencing a serious electoral ebb, which threatens their participation in the next National Assembly. Politicians from IMRO and NFSB allowed themselves insulting qualifications to the protesting citizens, calling them "paid", "lumpen" [from German "rags"] and "losers". Deputy Prime Minister and IMRO leader Krassimir Karakachanov, in his typical style, said the purpose of the protests was to create a "gender republic" and legalise same-sex marriage. NFSB leader Valery Simeonov urged Prime Minister Borisov to adopt a firm approach and disperse tent camps and blockades in the capital city and in other cities in the country. Regarding the idea of GERB for a new constitution and the convening of a Grand National Assembly, the United Patriots stated that they would insist on the inclusion of their proposals in the draft. Among them are educational qualifications for voting, the introduction of compulsory voting, a return to conscription, guarantees that marriage in the country will be only between a man and a woman, and providing a legislative initiative to the president.

Hristo Ivanov's action near Rosenets and the protests have highlighted the behind-the-scenes factors of MRF, whose "emblem" is the party's honorary chairman Ahmed Dogan and oligarch Delyan Peevski. MRF described Hristo Ivanov's action as the PR of a politician who is trying to raise his rating on the back of MRF. However, Hristo Ivanov's action exposed the problems with Dogan's estate in Rosenets and the lack of action by the state. The protests prompted authorities to take stock. The municipal road barrier was removed so that it was possible to reach the beach. In addition, it was proved that some of the buildings and the greenhouse in the mansion were illegal and had to be demolished. MRF has always been seen by the majority of Bulgarian citizens as a party symbol of the backstage, oligarchy and mafia in the country, which is confirmed by recent opinion polls. The behind-the-scenes management of the economic circles around MRF and GERB intensified the symbiosis between the two parties, which caused damage to the image of GERB. MRF remains reserved about the protests and does not support the request for the resignation of the chief prosecutor. This reinforces even more the prevailing public suspicion that Delyan Peevski is behind the election of Ivan Geshev as chief prosecutor. Dogan and Peevski continue to be the main problem for MRF in terms of reputation. This makes the party an undesirable partner for anyone governing the country. According to analysts, if MRF does not start purging its own ranks and does not adopt the path of renewal, it will remain in political isolation for a long time to come.

The biggest winner in the protests is Democratic Bulgaria, with the coalition doubling its electoral support in two months. The formation is the most consistent political force, defending the position of reform in the prosecutor's office, the fight against the mafia, and the rule of law. Hristo Ivanov's action in Rosenets and a series of activities increased confidence in him. Hristo Ivanov submitted a motivated request to the Council of Ministers to oblige the Minister of Justice to propose to the Supreme Judicial Council to initiate disciplinary proceedings against the chief prosecutor, which would have him removed from office for damaging the prestige of the judiciary. Following the ruling of the Constitutional Court that any ordinary prosecutor can investigate the chief prosecutor, Hristo Ivanov filed a complaint with the Sofia City Prosecutor's Office requesting an investigation against the chief prosecutor for having made public conversations gathered through special intelligence devices, which is prohibited by law. Hristo Ivanov turned to Boyko Borisov to order the services and the Ministry of Interior to comply with the law and to send all declassified documents to the archives. This will expose all backstage deals and companies involved in organised crime. Ivanov urged Borisov to speak about his close relations with the representatives of the former SIC (Security Insurance Company) criminal organisation such as Mladen Mihalev - Maggio and Rumen Nikolov - Pasha, with whom Borisov was a partner in Theo International. Ivanov gave a reminder that this company was behind the illegal production of cigarettes near Bourgas in 1995, when it was closed after a police operation, which became known years ago

from the revelations of the site for investigative journalism “Bivol”. Ivanov demanded answers from the prime minister, recalling the letters of the American ambassadors leaked to WikiLeaks, in which it was written that Borisov was involved in the smuggling of fuels from Lukoil and large-scale smuggling of methamphetamine. Ivanov made these appeals after Borisov tried to rewrite his own connections with Mladen Mihalev-Maggio. It is believed that even today the former SIC continues to have a huge influence in the economy and politics.

Democratic Bulgaria rejected GERB's idea of a Grand National Assembly, saying it was an attempt by the mafia to stay in power and make a substitution. According to the leaders of Democratic Bulgaria, changes are needed primarily in the judiciary and they can be made by the ordinary National Assembly.

“Volya” once again supported the cabinet in the vote of no confidence. The party presented a contradictory position on the ideas proposed by GERB for a new constitution and a Grand National Assembly. The party's chairman, Veselin Mareshki, said “Volya” would not be included in the proposal for the project, which required 120 lawmakers, but then took part in the debate.

The new party of showman Slavi Trifonov “There is such a people” is a third political force, and according to some agencies a second, on a par with BSP. At this stage, there is neither clarity about the party's programme nor the people who will participate in it. Trifonov supported the protests and rejected GERB's proposal for a Grand National Assembly, saying it was an attempt to buy time. He joined the opinion that GERB cannot propose a constitutional project in a National Assembly which has lost trust and legitimacy.

3

PUBLIC OPINION

A survey by Alpha Research conducted in late July and early August showed that more than 60% of respondents supported the protests demanding the resignation of the government and the chief prosecutor. 41.8% of Bulgarians said they fully support the protests, and 20.7% said they “rather support them”. 18.9% of respondents state that they “do not support them at all” and 18.6% that they “rather do not support them”. Almost 50% approved of the action of the leader of “Yes, Bulgaria” Hristo Ivanov in Rosenets in front of the summer residence of Ahmed Dogan.

President Rumen Radev received strong support in the conflict with Geshev. 45% of Bulgarians are on the side of the president, only 11% on the side of the chief prosecutor. 36.8% stated that they do not support either. In the conflict with Borisov, Radev received 43.9% support compared to 23.2% for the prime minister, and 28.8% did not take anyone’s side.

Over 50% of the respondents felt that the backstage movements around Delyan Peevski and Ahmed Dogan control the actions of Ivan Geshev. 44.4% of the respondents believe that the backstage machinations around Dogan and Peevski also control the actions of Prime Minister Boyko Borisov.

The greatest number of Bulgarians support the demand for the expulsion of the mafia from power - 46.8%, followed by the demand for the resignation of Boyko Borisov and the government - 45.4%, and the resignation of Ivan Geshev - 43.1%.

When it comes to the mafia, 47% of respondents believe that this applies to all parties, but most of all to GERB and MRF. Ahmed Dogan and Delyan Peevski are in the first place among the persons mentioned who have to be investigated. 61% believe that Dogan has influence in all important public spheres.

Only 20.1% approve of the actions taken by the chief prosecutor, and 43.7% consider his exploits to be PR activity and seeking media attention. Nearly a third of respondents believe that Geshev is driven by political motives, and 20% believe that he is attacking certain circles without reason.

The resignation of Geshev is also the most supported option for resolving the political crisis - according to 47.1% of Bulgarians, with 24.8% believing that such a step is not necessary. 40% of respondents believe that the way to resolve the crisis is to find a consensus between political parties in parliament and fulfil specific commitments until the regular elections in March 2021. The resignation of Borisov’s cabinet and early parliamentary elections is the third most approved option, indicated by 39.3%.

The work of the president enjoys the highest approval, with nearly 43% of the respondents giving him a positive assessment. A positive assessment of the work of the government is shown by only 13%, and respectively that of Prime Minister Borisov is 22.5%. Only 13% of Bulgarians give a positive assessment of the work of the chief prosecutor, which is approximately the same as the assessment of the work of the court.

The Alpha Research poll predicts a fragmented parliament in the next election, with 6 or 7 parties having the chance of surpassing the 4 per cent electoral barrier. The general conclusion is that all the parties in the current parliament are losing support, with this shifting towards the new players and the extra-parliamentary opposition. GERB has seen a significant decline in support by more than 7% from a previous poll by the polling agency conducted after the end of the state of emergency. At present, 14.5% of voters would vote for GERB, which again makes it the leading political force. BSP and the new party of showman Slavi Trifonov “There is such a people” have respectively 10.4% and 10.2%.

BSP also saw a decline in support, which is due to scandals and internal problems in the party ahead of the vote for a new leader on September 12th. Slavi Trifonov’s party has not seen any growth since the last survey. The most serious increase in support can be observed in “Democratic Bulgaria”, which has doubled its result and now 6.7% of all voters would vote for it. MRF remains in 5th place with 4.5% support. Maya Manolova’s project “Stand up, Bulgaria” is supported by 3.2% of respondents. Only 2.2% of voters would vote for United Patriots, which will make it difficult for them to enter parliament.

4

MAIN CONCLUSIONS AND FORECASTS

Bulgaria has entered a period of political crisis, with protests continuing for a second month likely to intensify in early September. Borisov's refusal to resign and the proposal for a Grand National Assembly are pushing the country in an unpredictable direction that could exacerbate the political confrontation. This is especially true in a complex economic situation, when adequate legislative measures must be taken to encourage business and the most affected sectors as a result of the pandemic.

The move to propose a draft constitution is an attempt to buy time because Borisov will not get the 160 votes needed to take the step of convening a Grand National Assembly. Most likely, in addition to BSP, MRF will also be against the idea. Moreover, the latest proposals of the patriots for a preamble in which to affirm the Bulgarian national identity will be met extremely negatively by MRF. Therefore, Borisov is considering another move - resigning and forming another government. Thus, he hopes to buy time, avoid forming a caretaker government, and focus on the work in the party. There have already been signals that Borisov has chosen Nikolay Mladenov, a former defence and foreign minister in his first government, as the new prime minister. Mladenov is currently the UN special envoy to the Middle East. The reason for this speculation was Mladenov's return to Bulgaria and his appearance on several television channels and in newspapers with extensive interviews on the occasion of the crisis in the country.

Mladenov has not been the focus of media attention in Bulgaria for more than 7 years, nor has he given interviews on any occasion during this period. That is why he is probably one of the possible options that GERB and Borisov are considering.

The sociological polls show a fragmented parliament at this stage for the next election, with support for GERB diminishing. A complex parliamentary configuration is on the cards. There is a clear public consensus for reform in the prosecution service, which will be the first major task of the next National Assembly, and it is this task that can unite the new parliamentary majority. If politicians and parties do not meet public expectations, protests are expected again. That which democratic anti-corruption parties and mafia groups can do is take steps even now to talk about future reforms around which to unite.

The international response has been a great success for the protesters. An even stronger response from the European institutions is expected, especially through the new rule of law mechanism, which can be a powerful tool for influence. This is also true of the activities of the new EU public prosecutor. If the European institutions remain passive, there is a risk that young people will be permanently disappointed by the protests, which are pro-European. And this opens the way to increasing Euroscepticism, which is not in the interests of either Bulgaria or the EU.

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ABOUT THIS STUDY

FES Bulgaria has been publishing the „Polit-Barometer“ since 2000, analyzing current and long-term political processes and identifying trends in Bulgarian politics with a special focus on the political parties as democratic actors. In a situation where

the quality and neutrality of Bulgarian media is under question, we aim to provide a scientific basis for a political discussion for Bulgarian and international readers.

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Bulgaria has entered a period of political crisis and the protests, which are in their second month, seem set to intensify at the beginning of September.



The move with the project for a new constitution is an attempt to gain time because Prime Minister Borisov will not get the 160 votes required in the National Assembly to take the step of convening a Grand National Assembly.



Opinion polls indicate a fragmented parliament for the next election, with declining support for GERB. A complex parliamentary configuration is to be expected.

Further information on the topic can be found here:
<http://www.fes-bulgaria.org>