

DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

POLIT-BAROMETER

Year 24 Issue 3
7th – 31st March

Boris Popivanov



Bulgaria faces early elections without a dominant dividing line in the political space.



The risk of political chaos posed by the unclear constitutional framework has not yet been overcome.



Public opinion is divided between everyday problems and national fears.

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1

THE DYNAMICS OF FOREIGN POLICY

Bulgaria's foreign policy line remains unchanged, although it remains in the shadow of the political crisis that is rife in the country. The period coincides with the celebration of the 20th anniversary of Bulgaria's accession to NATO. The assessment of the Bulgarian political elite, with few exceptions, is positive both for the global role of the Alliance and for the national participation in it. In the many events commemorating the anniversary, two dominant interpretations can be seen: the current government and the President. Resigned Prime Minister Nikolay Denkov emphasised Bulgaria's allied commitment in deterring Russia and defending democracy, while President Rumen Radev, as is his wont, emphasised the need for higher combat capability of the Bulgarian armed forces.

The crisis related to Denkov's resignation and the prospect of early elections does not confirm the thesis of monopoly of one political power, "We Continue the Change ("Produlzhavame Promianata") – Democratic Bulgaria" (PP-DB), on Bulgaria's Euro-Atlantic orientation. Denkov was given the opportunity to present his party as the guarantor of the Euro-Atlantic choice practically only at the regular European Council in Brussels. Some positive comments about the Prime Minister and the government (of French President Emmanuel Macron, and of Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte) do not give a clear preference for PP-DB. Influential European media, such as the France Press Agency and Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, which have their own sources in European political circles, rather regard both PP-DB and their rivals from GERB, as "pro-Western parties" that have failed to agree on a new cabinet. The same spirit can be seen in the words of the U.S. Ambassador to Sofia Kenneth Meriten, who publicly expressed regret that no new government had been formed within this parliament, but did not imply in any form the leading role of one of

the two coalitions. Despite the efforts of part of the government and key experts to suggest that there is a hidden pro-Russian agenda of GERB and of the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF), which have supported the cabinet up to now, these suggestions at least at this stage do not receive unambiguous support among the country's international partners. The accusations against GERB and MRF that their leading representatives were sanctioned under the Magnitsky Act and that they were involved in the construction of the Russian gas transmission project "Turkish Stream" in the past were reanimated. However, this does not lead to a strong resonance abroad. It should be taken into account that GERB's candidate for Prime Minister Mariya Gabriel is well known as the EU Commissioner and can hardly be perceived by her colleagues as a conductor of anti-European policy. Moreover, counter-accusations against the PP-DB sound that Defence Minister Todor Tagarev, who is their nomination in the government, supports the Allied commitments only verbally, because in the course of six months he has failed to organise the sending of Bulgarian armored equipment to help Ukraine. Foreign policy became an instrument of domestic political confrontation, but without visible consequences for the international authority of the candidates for the vote of the people.

The government, in an attempt to make a positive account of their nine months in power, made extensive use of Bulgaria's membership of the Schengen area along air and sea borders. This happened on March 31st and was marked with numerous ceremonies. Against the backdrop of the complete lack of clarity on the deadlines for full membership, affecting the land borders which are key for Bulgarian trade, and for membership of the euro area, initially announced for January 1st of next year, and this foreign policy success seems more modest than it is presented.

2

INSTITUTIONS AND THE PUBLIC AGENDA

The collapse of the majority. In the previous edition of the “Political Barometer” it was assessed that early elections are a possible, though less likely, outcome of the situation with the resignation of the Denkov cabinet. The motives for the assumption that it is more likely to come to a government in this parliament stem from the mutual interest of the political actors involved. First of all, Bulgaria’s international partners would undoubtedly appreciate such a solution, especially in the light of tensions between Russia and the West. Secondly, PP-DB would prefer a new cabinet due to (officially recognised) concerns about a lower result of early elections and also because of their intentions to complete certain projects in a number of areas. Thirdly, the interest of GERB and MRF in early elections also did not seem too high. True, they can expect a better result, but in recent months they have proven that they are able to impose their will on PP-DB and achieve their goals on almost every issue. Therefore, keeping PP-DB in the majority could have been presented as an ever smaller compromise, but also as a necessary defence against protests and accusations.

However, the scenario with early elections has come to pass, to the surprise of most analysts and some of the parties. Hypotheses have already been announced as to why this is the case. The official hypothesis of GERB is that they could no longer withstand the constant coercion for ministerial chairs by the smaller party in parliament. Conversely, opponents of GERB suggested that Boyko Borisov’s party disagreed with the loss of control over the prosecution and security services that would occur under a new government. There is also a personal explanation: that Borisov cannot accept anyone but himself to become prime minister on behalf of GERB, even if this man is the loyal Mariya Gabriel. There is also a conspiracy theory that Borisov, for unclear reasons, is forced to comply not with his political interest, but with the dictate of the co-chair of the MRF Delyan Peevski.

The chronology of the negotiation process for the formation of a new cabinet is complex enough and full of too many twists to be traced in detail. After

the resignation of the “Dekov” cabinet, negotiating teams of PP-DB and GERB were formed, which relatively quickly reached agreement on the political priorities. Later there were disputes over the staff of the Council of Ministers. It seemed as if the PP-DB insisted on a simple rotation, in which Nikolay Denkov and Mariya Gabriel changed their positions as Prime Minister and deputy Prime Minister, while the other ministers kept their seats, while GERB held a 50:50 division. At the same time, however, both groups have consistently declared that they are ready for concessions. The negotiations were terminated twice with mutual ultimatums, after which Mariya Gabriel received a mandate from President Rumen Radev to form a government and proposed a composition in which seven of the ministers were new and put forward by GERB, while all others were in the previous cabinet. A huge scandal broke out because PP-DB announced that the draft list had not been agreed with them at all. There was a third round of negotiations, which was terminated with the official argument that there was no agreement on the figure of the Minister of Interior. Gabriel gave up the mandate. GERB and MRF in parallel announced that they would no longer participate in any government talks in this parliament. PP-DB were also forced to return the second term of government unfulfilled, and then so were the party “There is Such a People” (“Ima Takuv Narod” - ITN), to which the President gave the right for a third attempt. This finally paved the way for early elections.

It can be inferred from this very brief summary that the primary task of the parties was to present themselves as constructive and that their partners were guilty for any new elections. This is logical, to some extent. Opinion polls show that the majority of Bulgarian citizens do not want early elections. At the same time, in the current situation, it is very difficult for people to understand what the reason for such elections is, apart from the behind-the-scenes haggling for posts. It can even be assumed that GERB conducted the negotiations fictitiously, with the intention of making them fail, but also with the ambition to transfer the responsibility for the failure to PP-DB.

However, this hypothesis may be supplemented by another one. In the draft composition of the Council of Ministers proposed by Mariya Gabriel, the seven ministerial positions of GERB are far from being by chance. They cover the geopolitical ministries (foreign affairs and defence), the Ministry of Interior, which is important in some reforms of the security system, but also energy and innovation, which are key for GERB in an economic sense. Under such a government, GERB would acquire almost the full package of shares on the foreign and domestic policy of the country, and PP-DB would be satisfied with secondary opportunities for realisation. Therefore, it can be assumed that GERB started the negotiations with two plans at the same time: to force the PP-DB towards total political capitulation, in which the new government would be under the control of GERB and the shared responsibility of PP-DB, or, if they fail, provoke new elections. In the end, the second option is taking place.

The President. The political crisis has focused on President Rumen Radev's behaviour. Radev has been the most consistent and widely recognised critic of the current majority and government since its first day. It is as if the disintegration of the majority, and the absurd twists with which this disintegration has been accompanied, serve to confirm the President's assessment. On the contrary, it is unprofitable for political parties to legitimise the right of the Head of State and to increase his public authority. For the parties, he should also be discredited in the course of this process, or at least made jointly responsible for the crisis situation. This can explain, for example, the appeals to Radev to annul the decree by which he mandated Mariya Gabriel to form a government, or the accusations that he knowingly collaborates with GERB in the election of a caretaker Prime Minister, or the allegations that he wants to use the European elections at the same time to sabotage the parliamentary elections in the interest of other parties.

The President went about things in an expected, but probably effective way. He fulfilled the procedure imposed under the constitutional changes point by point, although he constantly stressed how disastrous these changes are for the stability of a government. Radev tried both to distance himself from the responsibility for the constitutional procedure and not to leave the impression that he had a purely formal role. He warned the PP-DB that it was "late" for their demands for 2 in 1 elections, parliamentary and European, but set deadlines that made this possible in reality. He fuelled tension over his intentions with the declaration that he would not sign a decree on an official cabinet if he did not trust the ministers mentioned in it.

The President had to choose from among ten people to be caretaker Prime Minister. This task seemed difficult from the outset, because some of them (such

as the Ombudsman and the Deputy Ombudsman) found themselves unable to assume such a function, while others (such as the Governor and Deputy Governors of the Bulgarian National Bank) justified their refusal with a requisite from the European Central Bank. The parties tried to further hamper the election after GERB leader Boyko Borisov opposed the nomination of the President of the National Assembly Rosen Zhelyazkov, and PP-DB spoke out against the "bright political figures" from GERB. Radev finally referred to the President of the National Audit Office and former Speaker of Parliament by GERB Dimitar Glavchev, on the grounds that he was the only one of all ten potential figures to have agreed. Of course, this did not prevent immediate criticism that Radev wanted to bring GERB back to power through the back door. There were also criticisms in another direction – that Radev had not started constructing his party in time to be able to participate in an early election, and so once again he remained distanced from the real political process.

The emerging situation – of a caretaker government of the President not elected by the President – is unprecedented and requires very precise action on the part of the head of state in order not to be condemned as a culprit for deepening the political crisis.

Public opinion. The attention of Bulgarian society was attracted by heterogeneous events revealing certain trends.

In a few days, there were several incidents of foreign citizens. Residents of the Rhodope village of Hrabrino detained "suspicious" foreigners because of their appearance and skin colour, who subsequently turned out to be regular medical students. Soon after, mass comments and concerns were raised by three fights between Bulgarian and foreign citizens in Sofia. The reasons have not yet been fully clarified, but fuelled fears of illegal migrants and led to protests demanding the closure of a refugee centre in the district of Ovcha Kupel in the capital.

March traditionally sees the celebration of the anniversary of the rescue of Bulgarian Jews from the Holocaust during World War II. This year, this culminated in an institutionally supported and deliberately nationalist March of Tolerance, designed to legitimise the idyllic version of the Bulgarian elites about the treatment of Jews in the past. Alternative events were also held, reminiscent of less idyllic events during this period. The participants were branded as homeless and nihilists, serving Macedonian and Serbian propaganda clichés. The incident, extremely indicative of this, with the Bulgarian MP and former Minister Daniel Lorrere, who is of Jewish origin, falls into this context. He was surrounded in a Sofia restaurant by a group of nationalists and insulted with anti-Semitic exclamations.

The death of the Bulgarian Patriarch Neophyte caused genuinely nation-wide and unprecedented demonstrations of grief. Two days of national mourning were declared, and politicians from all parties, without exception, expressed their respect and reverence for the "spiritual father of the nation". Something also unseen, except on the first day of major military conflicts – the national television channel devoted nearly 40 minutes of its main news feed to the sad news, ignoring all the other events of the day. The funeral of the patriarch was held with military and state honours, with a ceremony that had had no analogue since the death of Tsar Boris III. All this is remarkable, including the fact that Neophyte has never before been a topic on the political agenda or in the rheto-

ric of politicians. It must be said that the funeral also took on an international flavour. The presence of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew stirred fierce controversy. The negative attitudes against Bartholomew were explained from two perspectives – with the centuries-old Greek resistance to Bulgarian Orthodoxy and with the rumours of Bartholomew's empathy towards Catholic and American strategic concepts.

The common denominator of these processes in public opinion is national fears. They reveal a society that is deeply concerned about its identity and its future, and in this sense is easily manipulated for xenophobic and anti-Semitic purposes, and which needs leaders badly, but does not see them in the political sphere.

3

THE STATE OF THE PARTY SYSTEM

GERB-UDF. Boyko Borisov's party seems to be in good political condition. Opinion polls invariably put it in first place, with an impressive distance between it and the second political force. The advantage of GERB in the local government is shown not only by the election results last autumn, but also by the local elections in recent weeks and by the huge difficulties experienced by the mayors of their political competitors from the PP-DB in cities such as Sofia and Varna. During the nine months of the cabinet "Denkov" GERB successfully played the role of "intra-government opposition" in order to finally regain its role from 2009-2021 as a leading and inevitable partner in all government negotiations.

Early parliamentary elections are a product of the will of GERB. Despite Borisov's ambition to present them as the responsibility of the PP-DB, it is difficult for this to be the case. Borisov had initially left his negotiating team to publicly produce the news from the talks with PP-DB, but later intervened personally, and in a sufficiently categorical way. There is no doubt that with his decision, the leader meets the expectations of his party structures and activists, who were obviously not satisfied with their party's secondary role in governing in the fact of electoral victory. At the same time, Borisov faces two other prospects – pre-election and post-election. The appointment of Dimitar Glavchev as an official Prime Minister inevitably raised criticism that GERB are returning to power "through the back door" and will organise the elections. This alone creates the conditions for an election campaign under the banner of "all against GERB", which should not be in the interest of a politically isolated party. What will GERB's attitude towards the caretaker cabinet be, and vice versa, in this sense is a matter of great political importance. Secondly, GERB are going into the elections with the clear intention of governing, and then in a better configuration than the one that seemed almost agreed with PP-DB. There are no guarantees that in the next parliament GERB and PP-DB will have more than 120 MPs together, so the support of a third party, not discreetly, but publicly, may turn out to be a necessity. If we are talking about a coalition

between GERB and MRF, the problem of gathering a majority remains, but a far more important thing is the problem of the legitimacy of such a coalition, which from day one risks being exposed to protest and international pressure. All other hypothetical majorities are too complex to predict. So the most significant difficulty for GERB, which, by the way, did not allow many observers to take seriously the option of early elections, is what (better than the current) governance formula they will be able to propose. Of course, non-public motives for the orientation towards an early vote, such as possible concerns about reforms in the security and judiciary sectors, should also be taken into account, but political uncertainty is an aspect that remains.

"We Continue the Change ("Produlzhavame Pro-mianata") – Democratic Bulgaria" (PP-DB). The coalition is, at least for now, the great loser from the political crisis in March. The prerequisites for the heavy losses of political positions were laid down at the beginning of the term, when PP-DB allowed GERB and MRF to be legitimised as irreplaceable and mandatory participants in the government dialogue, and when they believed that the rotation of the government was a purely technical process that could be taken for granted and which would take place without turmoil. These are also the reasons why PP-DB postponed the most important topics for them after the rotation – the amendments to the Judicial System Act, without which the constitutional reform in this part of it makes little sense; changes in regulators, which they thought would have the right of participation and veto in the case of a majority vote of two-thirds of MPs; and the changes in the security sector, for which they relied that GERB and MRF would have no choice but to support a rotation and a signed government agreement. So in March, it turned out that PP-DB did not have much to boast about after their 9-month term of office.

This caused a series of political errors with obvious image consequences. First, in the negotiation process PP-DB failed to demonstrate unity against the back-

drop of the monolithicity of GERB. While the leader of Democrats for a Strong Bulgaria Atanas Atanasov repeatedly publicly asked Boyko Borisov to help with a cabinet with Prime Minister Mariya Gabriel, the co-chairman of PP Assen Vasilev took a gamble by insisting that Mariya Gabriel “cannot and should not be Prime Minister”, obviously in the hope that GERB would be frightened and would make concessions. Secondly, PP-DB have too openly shown that they are in a weak position and that it is very important for them to preserve the current majority. They not only begged Borisov to intervene, but even when it was already clear that the game was over, they appealed to GERB to use the second mandate of PP-DB and to propose a cabinet with Gabriel. This weakness certainly did not work in favour of the image of bold and uncompromising reformers. Thirdly, PP-DB have in principle misunderstood their main messages. With the intention of speeding up the negotiations, they announced that they had no discrepancies with GERB in the priorities of the government, thereby de facto admitting that the entire clash was conducted for posts and appointments. The overall inconsistency was highlighted when the PP-DB with a special declaration stated that “GERB are on track” and “GERB need to find a way out of the crisis”, while constantly proposing more and more new formulas and ideas. Fourthly, PP-DB demonstrated too harshly their policy of double standards. After nine months of explaining that the government is Euro-Atlantic and that the constitutional changes are their idea and their cause, during the rotation negotiations GERB began to attack, stating that serve Russian interests, Prime Minister candidate Mariya Gabriel is the “beautiful face of the mafia”, and the constitutional texts complicating the election of the caretaker Prime Minister were GERB’s proposal. From all these statements one would get the impression that PP-DB ruled together with the Mafia and in the service of Russian interests, and their most prominent brainchild, the Constitution, was actually the work of other parties.

Like any conjunctural endeavour, so also constitutional reform turned against its initiators. PP-DB sought to limit the powers of the President, but brogught Bulgaria up against a constitutional crisis, effectively awarded the prime ministerial post to GERB and retained the full powers of the caretaker cabinet, due to the postponed law on their limitation. Last but not least, the decision to return the President’s second mandate unfulfilled should seem like a sign to GERB, but in practice showed the political isolation of PP-DB, who almost openly admit that they are unable to find partners outside GERB.

The opening negotiations for lists for national and European elections have traditionally been fraught with tensions between the partners in this coalition. This stage is likely to be overcome, but the gloomy out-

look remains in place. PP-DB seem to have sacrificed all their claims of principle and expertise, a monopoly on Euro-Atlanticism and the reform initiative. It is no coincidence that analyses have emerged that predict a serious collapse for PP-DB in the upcoming elections, more serious than current studies indicate. The conclusions, of course, are premature because PP-DB, as before, have no rival in their electoral niche.

The Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF).

Following the election of co-chairs earlier this year, the party also elected its operational leadership. The new Central Operating Bureau mostly includes figures considered close to Co-President Delyan Peevski – local leaders from the districts where he ran for MP, or mayors with whom he had regular interaction, or people with a business profile, who have so far been rather far from the high party echelons. However, the Vice-President of the European Parliament Ilhan Kyuchyuk, whom many observers in previous periods considered as an alternative to Peevski, is impressed. Either way, at least apparently, Peevski’s power seems to have been consolidated.

MRF have long been sending signals that they are ready to support a new government of GERB and PP-DB. It is true that the attacks and criticisms against PP-DB, blamed for even sabotaging the intended rotation, did not stop. After the collapse of the cabinet talks, MRF dramatically hardened their tone and declared the early elections the only way out of the crisis. It could be assumed that MRF and Peevski personally have an interest in new elections not only because of hopes for strong performance, but also because of the need to legitimise the new leadership in the electoral process. It should be recalled that the current parliamentary group of the party is a product of the arrangement of electoral lists at a time when former leader Mustafa Karadayi played a dominant role. Involuntarily cooperating with Peevski’s ambitions are the actions of the circles of PP-DB, which circulate the version that the new elections are due to Peevski’s pressure on GERB and Borisov. In this way, Peevski’s key position stands out even more. Last but not least, a publicly stated objective of MRF is for them officially to enter the executive power, which could not have happened without a new parliament. Early and quite preliminary calculations suggest that a parliamentary configuration is possible, in which GERB mathematically could not form a majority without MRF.

“Vazrazhdane” (“Revival”). Kostadin Kostadinov’s party appears to be in the process of rebuilding after a series of departures and exclusions of MPs and municipal councillors. From the very beginning of this parliament “Vazrazhdane” have appealed for early elections, but now it seems that they are not ready for them. At the very least, there is a risk of not showing such a significant increase compared to April 2023 that would

seal the claim for continuous upward development. Such could be one of the explanations for the party's most significant move in March, to table a bill on Bulgaria's exit from NATO. The formal occasion was the 20th anniversary of the country's membership in the Alliance. But in fact, in the absence of public dialogue and sentiment on this topic, a bill of this nature could only bring together the so-called Euro-Atlantic powers, GERB and PP-DB, and help overcome their differences. Undoubtedly, for "Vazrazhdane" it would be more advantageous to further weaken the two formations in a new unpopular government. Early elections do not cancel this scenario, but certainly postpone it.

The Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP). Korneliya Ninova's party is in a period of deepening crisis. The attacks of the narrow party leadership against influential local structures such as that in Sofia, and not only there, provoke a new series of statements of leaving for BSP or for opposition-type behaviour.

It got as far as the announcement of a new intra-party opposition movement, which took the name "Buzludzantsi" – a symbolic sign of continuity with the traditions of the party, established more than 130 years ago at Buzludzha peak in the Balkan Mountain Range. Together with internal party oppositionists, the inaugural meeting was attended by quite a number of figures related in the past to BSP. This could, to some degree, become a drawback for the new movement, because some of them are viewed as having some notoriety among socialist voters. At the same time, the fact cannot be ignored that for the first time two principled opponents such as former leader Sergey Stanishev and former President Georgi Parvanov stood together. There are indications that the movement will try to promote the Sofia party leader Ivan Takov as an alternative to Ninova. It is a matter of carefully thought-out campaign for two reasons: Takov is still relatively little known to the national audience, and his messages, focused on the past and traditions, would hardly have a significant impact on younger generations of Bulgarians. For quite some time, the Achilles heel of all the

struggles in the left political space has been self-closing in an aging electorate.

Ninova's traditional approach in such cases is to insert a division between "real" and "false" socialists, with the latter denoting his opponents accused of working for business interests or other parties. The decision for early elections puts Ninova and her entourage up against a complex test. On one hand, if the elections were only European, BSP would almost certainly suffer a serious disaster, mostly because of their anti-European messages. Also, the presence of a parliamentary vote is an alibi for new consolidation against the opponents of the leadership in the name of "common party success". This is an important step ahead of the election of a new party chairperson, scheduled for this autumn. Whether Ninova decides to run, in doubtful compliance with the statutory rules, or will appoint her successor, it is important for her to postpone the internal party discussion as long as possible. On the other hand, the erosion in party structures in the past year since the last parliamentary elections has been so advanced that it is very difficult to expect a better electoral performance. In this regard, Ninova's team is oriented towards the easiest solution. Using the nomination of a new caretaker Prime Minister in the face of Dimitar Glavchev, the party leadership launched a campaign with preliminary accusations of dishonesty in the elections organised according to the messages of this campaign from the collaboration between President Radev and GERB.

"There is such a people" ("Ima Takuv Narod" - ITN). For the first time since the big election successes of 2021, Slavi Trifonov's party received a mandate to form a government by President Radev. The event is purely formal, because there were no chances for a cabinet, but still reminded voters that there is such a party that it supports opposition behaviour and that it can be part of the political process. It cannot be argued that the President's intention was to legitimise ITN at the threshold of the election campaign, when the party itself is on the verge of entering a future parliament, but the effect could be in a similar direction.

4

MAIN CONCLUSIONS AND FORECASTS

The political crisis in Bulgaria is unfolding against the background of public apathy. There is little interest in elections – national or European – at this stage. The topics on which political parties clash in public do not give hopes for higher motivation. Disputes over the security services, the figure of the interior minister, the judiciary, the authorship of constitutional changes, or the monument of the Soviet Army are hardly inspiring. Even the thesis that Bulgaria's geopolitical orientation is at stake does not encounter mass repercussions. Despite separate political demands, radicalisation on the issue of "for" or "against" NATO simply does not exist. The latest Eurobarometer survey published in March found that the most serious problems for Bulgarians are the economic situation and unemployment (39 %), health care (28 %) and the cost of living (26 %). It is remarkable that none of these areas is seen as a priority in the negotiations for a new government. The most accurate commentary is stated in the title of an article of none other than the "Euro-Atlantic" media "Dnevnik": "Bulgarians are excited about problems other than the drama in the central government" (March 27th). This is, in any case, a tough sentence not only for the main players GERB and PP-DB, but also for the Bulgarian Socialist Party, which does not want to or cannot bring the agenda of Bulgarian politics closer to the agenda of the Bulgarian citizens – despite all the undisputed conditions for this.

If in March the main intrigue in Bulgarian politics was "who will be responsible for early elections", then in April a new version of "who will be responsible for the caretaker cabinet" will emerge. Formally, it should be the President. But since the constitutional changes deprive him of the right to elect a Prime Minister himself and to appoint ministers, it is unlikely that Radev would agree that all the positives and, above all, the negatives of the functioning of such a cabinet should be accredited to the account of the presidential institution. The figure of the caretaker Prime Minister, in turn, refers the responsibility to a

particular political party, whose interest is also hardly seen as a behind-the-scenes contender for a "victory by default". A number of parties have already declared, without anyone asking them, that they will not join in the cabinet with their representatives. And if we take into account the fact that during the period of operation of this cabinet Parliament, unlike in previous periods, will work, but only if there is no majority, the problem of the responsibility of legislative activity remains alongside the problem of the responsibility of governmental power. Any improvised solutions that could complicate government beyond recognition are hypothetically possible.

The integrity of the elections is also a topic that has traditionally arisen in Bulgaria, but now its weight seems to be greater than usual. Without having a caretaker cabinet appointed, a number of parties are already accusing it of intentions of electoral manipulation. This will also have a demotivating effect on voters. The presence of literally the same parties that took part in the April 2023 elections, with few exceptions (MRF and VMRO) with the same party leadership, does not contribute to higher electoral motivation. The first elections in a long time, in which there is no clear dividing line between party competitors, such as the left-right axis in the past or the recent tensions of "status quo versus change".

Usually, before elections, the potential for the emergence of a new party that could create an intrigue is discussed. Until the registration of party lists, there is time for one to appear. However, if it is not openly related to President Radev, there is practically no chance of drastically shifting existing cross-party balances. Even if this were the case, the risks would be too numerous, and the time too short for there to be any guarantees of success.

The conditions for deepening the crisis of confidence in the constitutional system and political parties are there for all to see.

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