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Bulgaria's Political Parties

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- The political situation in the country will continue to be determined by the upcoming presidential elections. The country is entering an election campaign period. It seems that the main issues to be tackled in the forthcoming campaign will be the migrant flow, the challenges facing the country with regard to the international security environment and the crisis in the EU.
- Despite the scandals and the tension during the nomination process for the Reformist Bloc's candidate for president, the news is that there will be a joint nomination. The Bloc's main goal is to preserve its consolidation during the elections, while the results will determine whether the project has a future.
- The alliance between the Patriotic Front and "Ataka" for the elections is a major surprise, given the deterioration of the relations during the past year of NFSB's leader Valeri Simeonov and the leader of "Ataka" Volen Siderov. The union between the nationalist formations might continue even after the presidential elections. But everything would depend on the performance of their presidential nominee tandem – Karakachanov-Notev.
- The current campaign is of enormous importance for BSP. After heavy election losses in the past few years, the new leadership, represented by Kornelia Ninova, is ambitious to restore the electoral and political positions of the party. Rumen Radev is an unfamiliar figure for the public, but all things indicate that BSP will attempt to turn this to its advantage.

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1. Political Situation

During the last three months the domestic political situation has been determined primarily by the process of nominating the candidates for president by the major political parties in the country. The exacerbation of the security environment in the region of the Middle East and Turkey, following the failed coup d'état, has raised concerns for a new migrant flow towards Bulgaria. In response, a series of foreign policy initiatives undertaken by the Bulgarian government followed, which influenced the political debate in the country.

1.1. Domestic policy

The nomination process for the candidates for the presidential elections was delayed in this year's campaign. Largely, this is part of the go-slow strategy chosen by the political parties – on one hand, but on the other – on account of the difficulties and tensions in the interparty relations – both in the left-wing, as well as in the right-ring. This delay was also significantly influenced by the incumbents from GERB - the electoral leader for the moment, who declared that they will announce their candidates for the presidential tandem on October 2nd.

At the end of July, before the summer parliamentary vacation, the National Assembly passed the amendments to the Law on the Judiciary, thus conclusively finalising the legislative part of the judicial reform. The second part of the judicial reform became a fact after the endorsement of the amendments to the Constitution in December of 2015. With the changes, the lawmakers approved the strengthening of self-rule of the courts. Apart from this, every General Assembly of the respective court is given the opportunity to make proposals for the appointment of the chairperson of the respective court and to hear all

the candidates, and this is the change that will enhance the self-rule of the courts. By the approved amendments, before their appointment as experts at the Inspectorate of the Supreme Judicial Council, the candidates will undergo an integrity check and will declare consent that, during their term in office, they will periodically undergo such checks. The integrity check includes a check of the declared facts and circumstances related to their property ownership status and conflict of interests.

The Constitutional Court ruled that all three referendum questions initiated by the showman Slavi Trifonov, which were opposed by President Rosen Plevneliev, are unconstitutional. The three questions concern the reduction of the number of Members of Parliament to 120, the direct election of police chiefs and a second vote for the implementation of electronic voting. According to the Constitutional Court, the reduction of the number of MPs presents an inadmissible change in the form of state governance, which could only be done by a Grand National Assembly. In its reasoning the court points out that the executive branch of power will be directly hindered in meeting its constitutional responsibilities if direct election of police chiefs is implemented. According to the Constitution, public order and national security are prerogatives of the Council of Ministers, but this also includes the obligation to select its own personnel. The Constitutional Court did not allow the question about electronic voting, because a referendum had already been held on the matter, in which a smaller number of people had participated than those who took part in the last held elections.

The supply of Russian natural gas for the future European gas distribution "Balkan" Centre, located in Bulgaria, as well as the construction of a gas pipeline along the

bottom of the Black Sea to Varna, will be the focus of the tripartite meeting between Bulgaria, Russia and the European Commission to be held this autumn. This became clear during an investor's roundtable on the new Balkan gas hub, organised by the state-owned gas operator Bulgartransgaz in Varna. This was announced by Prime Minister Borisov, who also took part in the roundtable talk. According to him, now it is the time to conduct tripartite talks with each party: with Russia, Azerbaijan and representatives of the European Commission. Borisov stated that he "will not allow Bulgaria to be circumvented, and our right to a veto in the EU will be used." In his words, now is the moment in which our country has to take advantage of its geostrategic location for gas transit. The Prime Minister added that Bulgaria has always maintained its loyalty as a member of the EU, even after tolerating negatives and has proved that it is a part of Europe and the common energy union. He expressed confidence that now the EU will not allow our country to be excluded from the gas transit system, thus turning us from a transporter into a client. Deputy Prime Minister Tomislav Donchev clarified that the forthcoming tripartite meeting Bulgaria-European Commission-Russia is expected to be held as early as this autumn. The Director of the Internal Energy Market of the Directorate-General for Energy with the EC, Klaus-Dieter Borchardt, who was also a guest at the roundtable, stated that the European Commission expects that by November 8th Bulgartransgaz will submit the financing proposal for the feasibility study of the Balkan gas hub.

1.2. Foreign policy and European policy

On September 14th and 15th, Bulgaria hosted the 12th annual meeting of the presidents of countries in the Arraiolos

group. During the forum the Heads of States of the parliamentary republics in the European Union discussed the future of united Europe and the Balkans, as well as the challenges that we are faced with today – the migrant crisis, the fight against terrorism and Europe after Brexit. Apart from the host – the President of Bulgaria Rosen Plevneliev - others who took part in the forum were: the President of the Federal Republic of Germany Joachim Gauck; the President of the Republic of Italy Sergio Mattarella; the President of the Republic of Latvia Raimonds Vejonis; the President of the Republic of Malta Marie Louise Coleiro Preca; the President of the Republic of Poland Andrzej Duda; the President of the Republic of Portugal Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa; the President of the Republic of Slovenia Borut Pahor; the President of the Republic of Hungary Janos Ader and the President of the Republic of Finland Sauli Niinisto. Bulgaria was invited to join the Arraiolos group by Poland and Portugal in 2013 and during the meeting of the Group in Germany in 2015 our state was unanimously elected to host its next meeting. The informal forum for highest level political dialogue was set up in 2003 in the Portuguese town Arraiolos by the then President of the Republic of Portugal, Jorge Sampaio. The forum gathers together the presidents of the European Member States that do not represent their states at the European Council.

As a whole, during the forum all the presidents were unanimous that it is most important for the EU to remain united and that the most pressing issues can be solved through solidarity, unity and with the help of strong institutions. The guests also shared their fears for the future of Europe and how to overcome the lack of trust between the different institutions and between the Member States. Emphasis was placed on

security and the need for common actions against the threats. Regarding the integration of the Western Balkans, the common position was expressed that the integration process needs to continue and that it is a significant element of the EU's strategy for peace and stability.

The host of the meeting – the Bulgarian President Rosen Plevneliev – stated that today there is a record number of crises in the EU. According to him, the EU is unified in its resolve that the security of EU citizens is an absolute priority. Plevneliev also pointed out that it is necessary to strengthen border security and that it is unacceptable to allow an uncontrolled influx of migrants. According to him, an important part of solving the problem is the improvement of the conditions of living in the states that are the source of migration. Plevneliev was categorical that the problem is not in the integration within the framework of the EU but this is part of its solution.

The President of the Federal Republic of Germany, Joachim Gauck, stated that, despite the differences on some of the positions during the meeting, all the presidents expressed their strong support for the EU. According to him, the debates were particularly emotional but meaningful and useful. The President of Hungary, Janos Ader, in turn underlined that the process of integration of the Balkan states into the EU is a major element of the Union; the negotiations have to commence and to be accelerated hastily. In the short-term perspective, of primary importance, according to the Hungarian president, is the consolidation of the external border of the EU. The President of Slovakia, Borut Pahor, focused on the integration of the Western Balkans. According to him, it would be a huge mistake if these states were overlooked because of the EU crisis today. He believes that the expansion

towards the Western Balkans is not a technical but a political process.

The President of Italy, Sergio Mattarella, underlined that the challenges that the EU faces require much stronger cooperation – mostly in three aspects – management of the economies, migration and the threat of terrorism.

The President of Poland, Andrzej Duda, affirmed that there is no EU Member State where the standard of living before accession was higher than now. He expressed assuredness that the EU will withstand the challenges and will continue to exist. According to him, we all “want peace and development”; the EU is a project that guarantees the development of Europe and it has been demonstrated that EU membership leads to long-term benefits.

At the European Council meeting in Bratislava, held on September 16th, it was announced that Bulgaria will receive 108 million euro of urgent financial aid for protection of the borders and coping with the migrant flow. This was announced by the President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker. According to him “this funding will reach 160 million euro, as was requested by Prime Minister Boyko Borisov.” Juncker was categorical that Bulgaria will not remain alone and also can depend in the future on European solidarity with respect to the migrant crisis. In his state of the union address Juncker declared that by the end of October another 200 European border guards and 50 transport vehicles will be sent to Bulgaria. At the European Council summit, Prime Minister Borisov expressed satisfaction with the results achieved for Bulgaria and reconfirmed the readiness of the country to act as an effective external border of the Union.

As might have been expected, the attempted coup in Turkey was one of the is-

sues commented on in the public domain. The Bulgarian state condemned the attempted coup d'état and, at the same time, expressed concern for the possible exacerbation of the relations between the EU and Ankara with respect to abiding by the refugee deal. At the same time, Sofia follows a careful diplomatic tone in its relations with Ankara, owing to the challenges connected to the migrants.

1.3. Migrant crisis

At the end of September, the Ministry of the Interior announced that there has been an increase in the number of migrants that have entered the country. In the period August 11th – 18th some 816 migrants were apprehended by the Ministry of the Interior's authorities on Bulgarian territory. The figures show that, compared to the first week of August, when 687 foreigners were apprehended, there has been an increase of 19%. So, during this period there seems to be a record quantity of migrant flow into Bulgaria, compared to the beginning of 2016. From the figures made available by the Ministry of the Interior it becomes evident that a total of 11,025 migrants were registered on Bulgarian territory in the period January 1st – August 18th. The largest group of migrants is from Afghanistan. Since the beginning of August there has been a significance increase in the number of Iraqi migrants who have entered Bulgarian territory. Only one third are migrants from Syria who are seeking asylum in European Member States and are apprehended in our country.

Prime Minister Boyko Borisov stated that by the beginning of September the fence at the Bulgarian-Turkish border will be fully completed. He was categorical that Bulgaria will not accept relocated migrants from Western Europe if the deal between the EU

and Turkey for readmission is not implemented. Borisov also underlined that the EU has to understand at the same time the situation with the refugees in Turkey and to make concessions regarding the liberalisation of the visa regime with Turkey – initially for the administration, civil servants and representatives of business.

The migrant crisis is a problem not only for the European Union and its Member States, although it is most strongly felt in Europe, and a universal solution cannot be taken by Brussels alone. However, Brussels can assist in bringing together the positions and in consolidating the efforts of the EU Member States to find a solution. The Prime Ministers of Bulgaria, Hungary and Serbia – Boyko Borisov, Viktor Orban and Aleksandar Vucic, were united on this issue during their meeting in Bulgaria.

Prime Minister Borisov emphasised that, without joint efforts by all the EU Member States, a common and lasting solution to the problem could not be found. He stressed the need for the EU to act as one and called upon finding a common European solution for coping with the migrant flow. The Bulgarian Prime Minister underlined that our country will accept assistance for guarding the border but also accentuated on the role of the cooperation between the EU and Turkey for restricting the migrant flow towards Europe.

Borisov acquainted the two Prime Ministers with the actions undertaken by our state for guaranteeing security and calm at our border. According to him, Bulgaria bears an enormous responsibility as an external border of the EU with Turkey. The Prime Minister also highlighted that we are faced with a "historic challenge for the security of Europe and we have to seek a united position for a new migrant policy with a long-term perspective, as well as adequate

measures for our own protection." According to him the already built protective installations serve "to have any real chance of protecting the European border at all, for which we are responsible."

2. State and Development of the Main Political Parties

2.1. Trends in the Parliamentary Represented Parties Supporting the Government

2.1.1. GERB

GERB's Executive Committee decided to announce the candidates for president and vice-president on October 2nd, 2016 – only 4 days before the start of the official election campaign and just a month before the elections.

During the past quarter, GERB maintained silence, although a number of times they stated that they have clarity about their candidates. Subsequent to the statement made by the current President Rosen Plevneliev that he will not run for a new mandate, the speculations as to who would be GERB's candidate became one of the topics discussed during this quarter.

Prime Minister Borisov denied that he would run for Head of State. According to him, if he were to do so this would "plunge the state into a political crisis," and at the same time the President does not have "so much power of decision." He stated that he would run for president in 5 years' time – till then there is a great deal of work to be done.

At this point in time the most probable candidates for president remain – the Mayor of Sofia, Yordanka Fandakova, and the Mayor of Burgas – Dimitar Nikolov, both of whom are deputy chairs of the party.

The chairman of GERB's parliamentary group, Tsvetan Tsvetanov, explained the delay in announcing the candidates with the "complicated international situation."

According to him, the candidates are clear and the structures are ready to accept the decision, which will be taken conclusively on October 2nd. Tsvetanov noted that the initial intention was for the candidacy to be announced in the middle of September but the delay was imposed "not because there is no decision but because we want the government, the local authorities and parliament to work peacefully during all these months." Once again Tsvetanov amplified the presumptions that GERB's candidate would be a woman by saying that – "a woman is more suited to be candidate for president. Do you reckon that Chancellor Angela Merkel is coping badly? I have admiration and respect for Bulgarian ladies."

Tsvetanov underlined that the presidential institution is exceedingly important for the country and called upon the people to be active because high electoral activity would provide "real representation of the Bulgarian citizens in the presidential institution." According to him, "the President will be the true mediator, who will have to ease the political confrontation." Tsvetanov declared that the main slogan of the party's election campaign shall be: "We are working in the interest of the people." He underlined that the victory of GERB's candidate at the presidential elections will bring the political stability which the country will need when we take on the responsibility of the Bulgarian presidency of the Council of the European Union. He pointed out that this has been put forward by 6 months and will start at the beginning of January 2018.

2.1.2. Reformist Bloc (RB)

The process of raising a joint candidate for president by the Reformist Bloc was fraught with tension and conflicts. The two fractions in the Bloc – that of those close to DSB and the Civil Council, and the other,

related to the Bulgaria for its Citizens Movement (BCM) of Meglena Kouneva and UDF, were in constant public confrontation and at several times even crossed the line of good manners. This created the feeling that they would fail to nominate a joint candidate. Such a development, in fact, would have meant the demise of this political project.

After numerous talks and negotiations, where several names were mentioned – of Grozdan Karadzhov from the Civil Council, of Gen. Sabi Sabev and Traicho Traykov – finally they managed to agree on a joint candidacy. With a decision of the Executive Board of the Reformist Bloc, the candidate presidential pair that was nominated is as follows – Traicho Traykov – for president and Gen. Sabi Sabev – for vice president. Hence, the crisis within the coalition with respect to the presidential nomination, which had lasted more than a month, was resolved. Traicho Traykov was Minister of Economy, Energy and Tourism in the period 2009 – 2012 in the first cabinet of Boyko Borisov. As minister his work was mainly focused on the ‘energy’ sector. Traykov insisted on the diversification of natural gas supplies to the country and at the same time negotiated with Russia for a reduction in the price of natural gas. He admitted the possibility for the implementation of the Belene NPP project, but only with private capital and without state guarantees. He was ousted from the government after a misunderstanding with Prime Minister Borisov, regarding the energy projects of the country. Subsequently, he became part of the Civil Council of the Reformist Bloc since its founding in 2013. Currently, he is municipal councillor in Sofia, elected with the Reformist Bloc ballot list.

The candidate for vice president Gen. Sabi Sabev is chairman of the Association of the Officers in the ‘Atlantic’ Reserve and

was the representative of Bulgaria at NATO’s Headquarters.

In his first public appearance as the official nominee for president Traicho Traykov pledged to give “everyone a chance to see him as their candidate; all those that see themselves as democrats, patriots and Euro-Atlantic sympathisers will have their own candidate for president.” He expressed assuredness that his nomination is the one of the people who “want to live in a democracy and not in a dictatorship or an autocratic state.”

Traicho Traykov believes that the Head of State should be “a balancing figure, but not a puppeteer hidden behind the stage, and the leading principle in his work should be national interest.” He stated that he would not act as a counterpoise between the parties, because each and every one of them should protect national interest, regardless of their party and ideological differences. The RB’s candidate also explained that if he were to win the elections, he would complete the judicial reform and the main emphasis would be placed on the reform of the state prosecution.

2.1.3. Patriotic Front (PF)

The leader of VMRO, Krasimir Karakachanov, and the Member of Parliament from “Ataka”, Yavor Notev, were nominated as the candidates for president and vice-president by the ‘United Patriots’ Initiative Committee. Apart from the Patriotic Front, it is also comprised of Volen Siderov’s party – “Ataka”.

The new formation plans other joint actions after the presidential elections. According to the candidate for vice president Yavor Notev, the formations will “pursue a long-term horizon and long-term goals.” Notev declared that their candidate presidential tandem will exert efforts to achieve unity of all forces that describe themselves

as patriotic and that stand for the interests of the state.

In turn the candidate for president - Krasimir Karakachanov said that they “enter the race with the intention of proving that there is an alternative to the present model, that the patriots in Bulgaria are united and that the next tandem that would enter the presidency should be comprised of people that protect, above and before all, the Bulgarian national and state interests.” The leader of VMRO expressed gratitude to Valeri Simeonov and Volen Siderov for supporting the initiative to make a joint candidacy of all the patriotic parties. The leader of “Ataka” Volen Siderov also expressed his support for the tandem of presidential candidates. He reported the nomination as a success along “the way towards consolidation of the patriotic vote at the future parliamentary elections.”

At the start of the new parliamentary session, the chairman of the parliamentary group of the PF Valeri Simeonov read a declaration outlining the priorities of the political party during the new political season. The main emphasis was on the migrant issue. According to Valeri Simeonov, Bulgaria should state clearly that “it would not allow itself to be transformed into a borderline ghetto of the EU and a quarantine camp for the settlement of adventurers from all over the world.” He promised that the PF would not use the complicated situation and difficulties that the country faces for “either cheap partisan propaganda, or unprincipled criticism of every action by the government.” He pointed out that Bulgaria has to be treated on equal grounds with the other two states, subjected to strong migrant pressure. According to him, Bulgaria has to declare clearly that it unilaterally freezes the implementation of the Dublin regulations. Apart from this, Simeonov believes that the

Bulgarian government should ask the EU to provide funding for security of its external border.

From an internal party perspective Valeri Simeonov said that for the PF a main priority continues to be the desire to oust MRF and DOST from the political life in the country. According to him, for decades MRF and since recently now DOST, as well as the Grand Mufti’s Office “have used religion as a way to alienate some of the Bulgarian people.” Valeri Simeonov said that the PF will insist on the passing of the draft law on religious denominations that prohibits the financing of religions from abroad. He highlighted that the draft law banning burqas will be endorsed soon, as well as the one on radical Islam. According to him, a primary task of the PF is also the task of reviving the Bulgarian economy. Valeri Simeonov said that the problems in the energy sector would also be of primary importance for the PF.

In the middle of September, the National Assembly rejected at first reading the draft law submitted by the MP from the PF Krasimir Karakachanov and a group of Members of Parliament for the reinstatement of the compulsory military service. The draft law gathered the support of only 28 Members of Parliament. It envisaged compulsory military service of up to 6 months for all male citizens of the age of 19. As an argument in favour of the proposal, the sponsors pointed out that military service was characteristic for many European states, whether or not they were members of the EU and NATO.

2.2. Trends in the Parliamentary Opposition

2.2.1. BSP – Left Bulgaria

The forthcoming presidential elections are the first serious political challenge for the new leadership and leader of the BSP

Kornelia Ninova. On one hand, the internal party tension continues within the BSP and on the other, the fragmentation of the left space, owing to personal ambitions of separate leaders, further complicates the situation for good performance at the forthcoming presidential election.

Initially Kornelia Ninova extended a hand towards the other left-wing formations – ABV and Movement 21 of Tatiana Doncheva, and the different parties sat together at the table of negotiations, aiming at finding a decision to raise a joint left-wing candidate for president. BSP organised internal party poll, asking its sympathisers with which parties they want to form an alliance during the elections, and used it to legitimise the start of talks with other left formations and their leaders, who used to be part of BSP just a few years ago.

BSP leader Kornelia Ninova declared that within the structures of the party the greatest number of nominations for candidate president, apart from her, were received by Iliana Yotova, Yanaki Stoilov, Rumen Gechev, Mihail Mikov, Maya Manolova and Gen. Rumen Radev.

General Rumen Radev – the Commander of the Air Force, was one of the least expected nominations. Kornelia Ninova stated that she personally nominated the general. Tension within the party followed, as there were speculations that this in fact is the candidate of Georgi Parvanov and ABV, especially after ABV declared that they will support Radev's candidature, raised by BSP. It was clear that the two parties would go to the elections together, when surprisingly Kornelia Ninova said that all talks with ABV were cancelled and that Rumen Radev would be proposed by BSP, but raised by an Initiative Committee. Ninova blamed ABV for this development, because they insisted on parity participation of the two par-

ties in the coalition that was supposed to nominate Radev as candidate for president. Ninova explained that this is unacceptable – due to the electoral ratio of BSP and ABV, which is 10:1, as also demonstrated by the latest sociological surveys.

After the announcement of his nomination Gen. Rumen Radev deposited his resignation to leave the army. He was born in 1963 in Dimitrovgrad. In 1982 he left the Mathematics High School in Haskovo with honours. In 1987 he graduated from the Air Force Academy in Dolna Mitropolia, first in his class. In 1992 he successfully completed the officer training school – training squadron at Maxwell Air Force Academy, USA. He has a PhD in military science. In 2003 he graduated with honours from the Maxwell Air Force Academy, USA, with a Master's Programme in Strategic Research.

Finally, the candidate presidential tandem of BSP was officially declared in the middle of September – the runner-up to Rumen Radev is the MEP Iliana Yotova, nominated for vice president. Their candidatures were raised by an Initiative Committee.

At a press conference after the founding of the Initiative Committee, Radev stated that "Bulgaria is facing a crisis of values and governance." According to him the president should work for the security of the citizens in all spheres, seek consensus and expertise regarding foreign policy, and make civil society more active by listening to its opinion. According to Radev, the Head of State should act as "a social filter for the decisions that are against the Bulgarian people by imposing a veto on them." He also underlined that we need a "presidential institution that does not separate, but unites us." With respect to himself Radev said that he has "never worked against the interests of Bulgaria" and has "never been a hostage to corporate interests." Accord-

ing to him, there cannot be change and progress unless there is truth – about the real state of affairs in Bulgaria; the reasons that have brought us here; how we should and how we can move forward.

Rumen Radev also outlined the way in which, according to him, the future president should work. He said that the president has to be above all a guarantor of national security. He has to be aware of the problems facing the country and to be able to resolve them. Apart from this, the future Head of State should be able to restore the dignity of the nation – both within the country and outside it. Radev underlined that “at present the incumbents are afraid of a president who is not tied by dependences and cannot be controlled by them. They are afraid of a president who personifies the interests of the people and is openly and bravely committed to defending them.” Radev said that an end should be put to “complacency and the coalescence of one party with the state.” He directly accused GERB that “the party is in charge of the legislative and the executive power, has influence over the judicial power, and the president is also theirs. If we add media comfort to this, we end up with a total lack of control over the actions of this party.”

According to Radev, Bulgaria is at a crossroads and is at a critical point in its history. The migrant flow, the EU crisis and the social stratification of society are serious challenges that need to be addressed through actions and workable decisions. According to him, “poverty is on the rise, the quality of healthcare and education in the country is deteriorating, we are witnessing a crisis of governance and there is a crisis of values in the country, too.” According to him, the reasons for this are that for a long time now the political elite has no clear, long-term vision for the development

of the state. According to him, the forthcoming presidential elections are the closest and most realistic possibility for Bulgaria to start moving in a better direction. These elections will show whether the Bulgarians desire and have the will for change.

The candidate for vice president Iliyana Yotova in turn underlined that the new presidential mandate coincides with the 10th anniversary of our accession to the EU and added that 10 years later Bulgaria is once again placed last in various rankings. According to her, the Bulgarian citizens should be given the chance to “choose and to change by electing a strong president, a person of worth and able to bear responsibility.”

2.2.2. Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF)

During the opening of the new parliamentary session after the summer vacation, MRF declared that their main political goal after the presidential elections would be to provoke early parliamentary elections so that a new majority and a new government would be formed after that. MRF’s leader Mustafa Karadayi said that MRF will peruse carefully the platforms of the candidates for president and “will support the one that, according to the party, is necessary for Bulgaria and would be the most useful in protecting the national interest.” According to Karadayi, MRF relies on two main goals and values – unity and stability, and the party will support the candidate who professes these values. According to him, at present stability is more for the sake of appearances due to the existence of “anti-European and destructive elements in governance.”

In mid-September MRF was registered for participation at the presidential elections. According to the party’s leader, if the main political parties continue to neglect the presidential elections, then the MRF

might decide to raise its own candidate, who would take part in the elections. Karadayi underlined that the Honorary Chairman of the movement, Ahmed Dogan, fully complies with the profile and the vision of MRF on what the future president should personify. Karadayi stated that MRF would not give unsolicited support to any of the candidates of the other parties, but admitted that the movement has the confidence to be that decisive factor that could determine the winner at these elections at a possible second ballot. According to him, MRF has always played a key role in the presidential elections so far.

2.2.3. Bulgarian Democratic Centre (BDC)

In this quarter the formations within the parliamentary group of the BDC continued to follow diverse lines of political behaviour. The new party People's Union made an attempt for emancipation and conducting an independent political plan. At the same time, the former Leader Party, renamed to BDC, is getting closer and closer to GERB and supports the majority during key votes.

The leader of the People's Union, Rumen Yonchev, said that his party is considering supporting the candidature of Krasimir Karakachanov for president. According to him, the formation will support the candidature of the political centre, because at present Bulgaria needs this type of president. Yonchev expressed the opinion that this should be a person who "acknowledges the interests of the people and not their own party's interests." Therefore, the People's Union is considering the candidature of Karakachanov as the sole remaining centrist candidature but according to Yonchev – this is the "candidature of the patriotic centre."

2.2.4. "Ataka"

Volen Siderov explained the raising of the joint candidate presidential tandem with the need to achieve higher results at the elections. According to him, if the nationalists "continue separately and in confrontation, they will not go far." According to him, now the conditions are right for achieving a good result for "unification based on the understanding that we need a president and a vice president who represent patriotism and a different vision for Bulgaria with greater sovereignty, more confidence, with a correct perception about national interest."

Asked whether he is able to work together with NFSB's leader Valeri Simeonov, Siderov stressed that the present moment requires minimisation of confrontation and consolidation of the state. In achieving such a cause, all participants have to be constructive and to stop "playing at partisan politics." According to him, "many people will understand and appreciate the fact that persons and formations that up until recently were opponents have now thrown away their differences in the name of a common cause." Thus, according to the leader of "Ataka", the patriotic formations can rely on far more votes compared to the number of votes each one of them would have received separately.

During the inauguration of the autumn parliamentary session, the leader of "Ataka" Volen Siderov presented the speculative thesis that "NATO intends to move its nuclear weapons from Turkey to Romania by land via Bulgaria." According to Siderov, "we cannot rule out the possibility that our American partners will leave behind some nuclear fighting unit on our territory too." This would turn Bulgaria into a target for Russia. According to him, the danger of

an armed conflict in Europe is growing because we are witnessing the “accumulation of NATO’s forces at the Western border of Russia.”

Siderov underlined that the country faces such a threat and, therefore, all the politicians have to behave with national responsibility. The shift in the behaviour of “Ataka” can also be seen in the position expressed by Siderov that the country needs political stability and his party will support the government if it decides to continue to behave responsibly and protect national interests with regard to the migrants.

2.2.5. ABV

After the failure of the negotiations between BSP and ABV for raising a joint candidate for president, Georgi Parvanov’s party decided to nominate the former Deputy Prime Minister and social minister in the Boyko Borisov’s cabinet – Ivaylo Kalfin. The candidate for vice president who would stand next to Kalfin has not been decided yet. Officially the nomination of the tandem will be raised by the Kalfin – President Coalition, where apart from ABV there are also several other formations – Gergyovden Movement, GORD, the Party of the Green, the Liberals Bulgarian Party, the Active Civil Society Federation and the United Labour Bloc – Bulgarian Labourists. Kalfin was defeated by Rosen Plevneliev at the 2011 elections, in his capacity as the BSP candidate for president.

Kalfin declared that we would fight for changing the status quo, expressed in putting an end to the practice of “appointing people at 2, Dondukov Street.” According to him, the independence of the president “does not mean that he has to be at war with the government, but is measured by his courage to uphold different positions, if needed.” This also means that the institu-

tion should work “in cooperation with all the rest, but it should also act as a corrective.” Regarding the criticism that he often changes political parties, Kalfin, who has twice left BSP, stated that everything is a question of point of view and that he has always fought for causes. Kalfin appealed for greater social sensitivity of the president and more active moves of the institution towards solving the migrant issue.

Georgi Parvanov stated that, during these presidential elections, ABV will strive to change the ‘GERB’ model of the presidential institution. According to him, the present model is a vicious one, because the current President “constantly emits harmful, provocative foreign policy signals, which prove to be a risk factor for the security of the state and, namely because of this, the strategic blow of ABV will be directed against this model.” According to Parvanov, Ivaylo Kalfin is probably “one of the best figures in Bulgarian politics that can be nominated for the presidential institution”, because he is “exceptionally well-prepared, with rich and successful practice in all institutions.” According to him the situation in Europe, and in the Balkans, requires a very strong diplomat - a person with exceptionally great experience.

2.3. Positions of the Parties on Foreign and European policy

At the beginning of September BSP requested Prime Minister Borisov to have a hearing at the National Assembly in order to report on the type of issues that were discussed during his visit to Germany and Turkey, and what the positions were that he defended at the time. Angel Naydenov from BSP said that the country faces two main challenges – the risk of an uncontrolled flow of migrants and the incapability of the EU to formulate a common position

on this issue. Naydenov accused Borisov of committing to the position of Turkey – “either visas or migrants” and that by doing so has become “somewhat a courier of the Turkish side.”

Before the European Council meeting in Bratislava, the Patriotic Front posed the request to the government to put sharply and pressing before the European Council the issue of the need for a new European policy for deterring illegal immigrants at the Bulgarian border, which is also the external border of the European Union.

The candidate for president of the PF, Krasimir Karakachanov, also requested an immediate amendment of the Dublin regulations. Karakachanov criticised President Rosen Plevneliev for not summoning a meeting of the Consultative Council on National Security on the issue of the migrant crisis, as was requested by him. Karakachanov insisted that all the migrant accommodation centres located on the territory of urban areas in the Republic of Bulgaria should be closed down and moved close to the border, while the economic immigrants should be extradited to Turkey.

Karakachanov stated that the PF will not allow Bulgaria to be converted into a migrant centre in which illegal immigrants from all over Europe will be gathered, “invited by the Old Continent, but no longer welcomed by the German Chancellor Angela Merkel.” According to him, the political power that he represents “sharply objects and categorically opposes the ideas also launched by Chancellor Merkel that countries which refuse the so called ‘relocation’ or forced replacement and settlement of illegal immigrants will have to pay pecuniary fines.”

3. Public opinion

Research by Gallup, conducted immediately before the decision of the British people to leave the EU, shows that the Bulgarian society continues to be strongly pro-European oriented. The figures show that, if there was a referendum held in the country as to whether Bulgaria should remain in the EU, 61% of Bulgarians would have voted ‘for’ remaining and 20% ‘against’, and 19% are undecided.

Gallup International conducted a similar public opinion poll at the end of 2015 with a similar question, as part of a large-scale survey done in 14 European states. At that time, those in favour of remaining in the EU were 82% out of the potential participants in a similar referendum held in Bulgaria, and those against were 18%.

Asked if: ‘The European Union will disintegrate soon’ – 46% responded negatively, 27% answered affirmatively, while the remainder found it difficult to give an answer. 51% of the participants in the survey expressed the opinion that the leaving of Great Britain will affect the life of Bulgarians, while 30% of the respondents expressed the opposite opinion.

A survey conducted by Alpha Research in mid-September shows that Boyko Borisov continues to be the most approved party leader with a 32.6% approval rate. His actions during the past month, however, have increased the polarised attitude towards him, which is evident from the growth of both positive, as well as negative opinions regarding GERB’s leader. The situation in the left-wing is exceptionally interesting. After the nomination of Gen. Radev and the exacerbation of the relations between BSP and ABV, Georgi Parvanov marks a new drop by 2% and thus for the first time the rating of the former president has fallen to

that of the BSP leader – 18.3% for Georgi Parvanov and 18.5% for Kornelia Ninova. The new BSP leader emerges from the scandal without any damages. In this situation Tatiana Doncheva emerges as the left-wing politician with the highest personal rating. Her approval rating goes up to 21.9%.

Among the nationalists, the politician with the highest and fastest growing support is the leader of VMRO and candidate for president Krasimir Karakachanov with a 20% approval rating. Much lower are the ratings of the other politicians from this political spectrum – 13.4% for Valeri Simeonov and 4.5% for Volen Siderov.

The nomination of candidate for president from the Reformist Bloc after months of painful negotiations does not lead to any positive developments for either one of the leaders of the bloc. All of them preserve their relatively low levels of public approval – Meglena Kouneva (9.8%), Radan Kunev (7.8%), Nikolay Nenchev (7.3%), Bozhidar Lukarski (5.4%).

57% of the citizens eligible to vote declared that they will take part in the presidential elections, while 51% of the respondents declared readiness to vote in the referendum that would be held in parallel to the elections.

4. Main Conclusions and Forecasts

1. The political situation in the country will continue to be determined by the upcoming presidential elections. The country is entering an election campaign period. It seems that the main issues to be tackled during the forthcoming campaign will be the migrant flow, the challenges the country faces with regard to the international security environment and the crisis in the EU. The threat for sharpening the migrant pressure on Bulgaria remains strong. The complex relations between the EU and Turkey,

and the possibility that the refugee deal between the EU and Turkey might not be sealed, heighten Sofia's concerns.

2. GERB postponed the announcement of its candidates for the presidential tandem and this will be done immediately before the start of the official campaign. The most probable candidates for president still are – the Mayor of Sofia - Yordanka Fandakova, and the Mayor of Burgas - Dimitar Nikolov. One thing is for sure – GERB will bet on a figure that is easily recognizable by the public owing to the delayed start of their campaign. The opposite would place at risk their participation.

3. Despite the scandals and the tensions during the nomination process for the Reformist Bloc's candidate, the news is that there will be a joint nomination. The Bloc's main goal is to preserve its consolidation during the election, while the results will determine if the project has a future. Traicho Traykov is a well-known figure in politics but he is more of a technocrat and it would be difficult for him to embrace the role of a candidate for president.

4. The alliance between the Patriotic Front and "Ataka" for these elections is a major surprise, given the deterioration of the relations during the past years of NFSB's leader Valeri Simeonov and the leader of "Ataka" Volen Siderov. The union between the nationalist formations might continue even after the presidential elections. But everything would depend on the performance of their presidential nominee tandem – Karakachanov-Notev.

5. The current campaign is of enormous importance for BSP. After heavy election losses in the past years, the new leadership represented by Kornelia Ninova is ambitious to restore the electoral and political positions of the party. Rumen Radev is an unfamiliar figure for the public but all

things indicate that BSP will attempt to turn this to its advantage. As a professional and not a politician, Radev might win the sympathies of those Bulgarian citizens who are disappointed with the Bulgarian political scene in the past few years, reaching beyond the faithful electorate of BSP. A shortcoming of his would be his lack of experience, which could become evident during the campaign, especially at the time of the pre-election debates between the different candidates.

6. The MRF embraced an over-watch position during the past quarter. The party has been restricting its public appearances. There were almost no public reactions after the attempted coup in Turkey. However, the MRF is preparing its structures for the presidential elections with the ambition that it will have a decisive role in determining the final winner at a possible second ballot.

7. It is less and less possible to speak about the BDC from a political point of view. The formations continue to be disunited – Gergyovden will support the candidature of Ivaylo Kalfin for president, the People's Union will support Karakachanov, and the BDC most probably will support GERB's candidate for president. The parliamentary group is being kept alive artificially in order to take advantage of the privileges granted to parliamentary groups – participation in committees, parliamentary time for speeches by Members of Parliament, etc.

8. The decreasing confidence in "Ataka" is one of the reasons why Volen Siderov sought an alliance with the PF during these elections. Apart from this, the scandals surrounding Siderov make him even more cautious in his behaviour and public addresses. Whether this alliance could continue after the presidential elections or not will depend mostly on their results.

9. ABV decided to nominate Ivaylo

Kalfin as candidate for president after the failure of the negotiations with BSP. These elections are very important for ABV because the formation is fighting for political survival. Kalfin is a politician with enormous experience and can even attract centrist votes. His main shortcoming is that he has already lost one presidential election, and namely as BSP's candidate.

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