

DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

POLIT-BAROMETER

Year 24 Issue 10
November 1st – December 15th

Boris Popivanov



The chance for a regular government lies primarily with the tacit “anti-election” coalition of the majority of political parties.



The “sanitary cordon” against Delyan Peevski has become the central topic of the political agenda.



The difficult choice of Natalia Kiselova as Speaker of the Parliament burdens her with great expectations and opens up a political perspective for her.

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1

THE DYNAMICS OF FOREIGN POLICY

Bulgaria's membership in Schengen. The accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the Schengen area is a long-awaited event. As is known, the country had met the technical criteria back in 2011, and at least since 2022, Schengen had become a priority for Bulgarian governments. The politically motivated scepticism of countries such as the Netherlands and Austria postponed this moment until January 1st, 2025. The positive news is associated with various nuances and clarifications. Enthusiasm in Bulgarian society is somewhat lacking, firstly, because of the excessively long delay in time, and secondly, because of the increasingly distant attitude towards European politics. The decisions of a number of Western European countries to reintroduce checks on their "Schengen" borders are giving rise to uncertainty about the future of the Schengen area itself. The implementation of Schengen membership during the caretaker cabinet exacerbated disputes between political parties over the "lion's share" of the credit for the event. Instead of uniting, the "Schengen" impulse seemed to deepen political divisions. Last but not least, the coincidence of Schengen membership with the regime change in Syria provoked accusations from the nationalist party "Vazrazhdane" ("Revival") that this was a matter of a deal in exchange for which Bulgaria would accept Syrian refugees. The belief in an imminent migrant threat is widespread in Bulgarian society and represents one of the effective means of manipulation in the name of populist goals.

The election of Donald Trump as President of the USA. The upcoming change of administration in the White House will certainly have a significant impact on transatlantic relations and processes in the European Union. However, this does not mean that the political fate of the member states, and in particular Bulgaria, is directly dependent on the attitudes of Trump and his team. Even during the campaign for the 51st National Assembly, the thesis was widely circulated that the result of the US presidential vote would determine the chances for a regular government in Bulgaria. Many politicians and analysts pointed out that a Trump victory would tip the scales in favour of conservative forces, especially GERB, and would facilitate

nationalist visions at the expense of liberal-globalist ones. In November and December, warnings have continued to be sounded that a regular government in Sofia would not be formed until the first weeks of Trump's inauguration in Washington had passed, and his strategies towards Europe and Bulgaria had been clarified. Such a point of view shows ignorance of the mechanisms of American politics, but it sounds plausible to public opinion, accustomed to learning about external pressure, and seems convenient for Bulgarian politicians, who have been given an alibi for their helplessness in conducting coalition negotiations. Something of significance was the competition between Bulgarian parties to see who would be the fastest to congratulate Trump on his victory and express a desire to work with him.

The Ukrainian case. According to an already established tradition, the war in Ukraine serves as an instrument for political confrontation in Bulgaria. Ever since the 49th National Assembly and the government of Nikolay Denkov – Maria Gabriel, support for Ukraine has been considered to define the "Euro-Atlantic majority", opposed to the "Kremlin influence" in Bulgaria. It is probably in this context that Kiev's decision to award medals for services to the Ukrainian people to the leaders of GERB Boyko Borisov, the Movement for Rights and Freedoms – New Beginning (MRF-NB) Delyan Peevski and "We Continue the Change" Kiril Petkov should be interpreted. These are precisely the figures who embody the Euro-Atlantic majority of the previous year and Bulgaria's determination to closely support Ukraine in its war with Russia.

At the other extreme stands President Rumen Radev, who has consistently repeated that a peaceful solution to the war in Ukraine must be sought. The US presidential elections have probably indeed created conditions for mitigating the current extreme militarism, because Radev's calls for peace, made at the European Political Community summit in Budapest and at the ceremony to reopen Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, do not sound isolated and are impressive. Hopes for de-escalation in Ukraine, whether justified or not, in no way portend a weakening of Russia-West ten-

sions. In the context of Bulgarian politics, for example, it is important to cite the allegations of British media that Bulgarian citizens arrested in the UK on charges of spying for Russia are connected to President Radev. This is an issue that will almost certainly have repercussions in the domestic political debate in Sofia and will revise the beliefs about a division between “pro-Western” and “pro-Putin” elites in the country.

2

INSTITUTIONS AND THE AGENDA OF SOCIETY

The parliamentary deadlock. The work of the 51st National Assembly began in conditions of an unprecedented deadlock, in which for a month MPs were unable to elect a speaker. According to the Constitution, the very functioning of the parliament requires the constitution of its governing bodies. Both legislation and the possible formation of a government can take place after that. The political crisis of recent years has already offered cases in which the election of a speaker has been postponed, but never like now – 11 attempts, taking 26 days. The damage to the legitimacy of the parliamentary institution is undeniable.

The reasons for the deadlock should be sought in the behaviour of political parties, which in a post-election situation maintained purely pre-election-type characteristics, namely a confrontational attitude of each towards all others, concern about electoral negatives in the event of any partnership, and considerations about the context of holding future pre-term elections. This can easily be illustrated by three trends. The first concerns the reluctance of parties not only to openly support a candidate for chairperson of another party, but also not to allow their candidate to be supported by parties with which they do not want to be suspected of collaborating. The orientation of most parties was towards nominating their own candidates, regardless of their chances of being elected and without any efforts to seek external support for them. At the same time, explanations were heard from the parliamentary rostrum that candidates would not be supported not because of them or even because of the party that nominated them, but because of the danger of being supported by a third, unwanted party, most often “Vazrazhdane” or MRF-NB. The second trend concerns the reluctance of parties to allow any tactical advantage to a competing party in view of the starting positions in new elections. Here is a striking fact: the 11 elections for chairman were held under the same temporary procedural rules, according to which a candidate can be elected only if he or she wins the support of more than half of the 238 members of parliament registered at the beginning. This is at odds with the Bulgarian institutional practice of a runoff in a majoritarian election, which predetermines the victory of the one of the two

candidates who has won more votes than the other. This is how presidents and mayors are elected. It would have been very easy for the 51st National Assembly to overcome the blockage with a simple change in the rules, but no one proposed such a change. It is clear that no party wanted to create an artificial feeling of a majority behind the candidate of another party, subject to future image exploitation. And the third trend stems from the changes to the Constitution, according to which the Speaker of the National Assembly is one of the potential candidates for acting Prime Minister. Considering that President Rumen Radev, who appoints the acting Prime Minister, has repeatedly expressed criticism of the current acting Prime Minister Dimitar Glavchev, a convincing claim emerged that the election of the parliamentary leader is actually the election of a future Prime Minister. The tactics of the parties conformed to this idea. However, the idea itself suggests that no one seriously expects the parliament to work and form a stable regular cabinet. On the contrary, the expectation seems to be for quick pre-term elections, which will raise the question of the identity of the caretaker Prime Minister.

Parliamentary geometry. There are numerous analyses emphasising that the 51st National Assembly is highly fragmented. This fragmentation is complicated by the lack of bloc groupings and somewhat resembles a struggle of everyone against everyone else. In a sense, we are witnessing the legacy of two factors that have intensified the crisis of the party system – the protests of 2020 and the war in Ukraine since 2022. The first factor deepened the dividing line of status quo-change, reformulated as corruption-anticorruption, while the second factor has imposed the division of Euro-Atlanticism-Russophilia. The elections of October 27th produced the concept of a “sanitary cordon”. It was present in the declaration of the second parliamentary group, “We Continue the Change (Produlzhavame Promianata) – Democratic Bulgaria” PP-DB) and signified the desire to prevent Delyan Peevski’s MRF-NB, accused of corruption and undemocraticness, from reaching leading positions in parliament. Actually, there were two “sanitary cordons”. Once again, the decision was formulated not

to allow negotiations for interaction with the party "Vazrazhdane", considered an exponent of pro-Putinist and again undemocratic understandings. The problem with the "sanitary cordons", however, is that there are no clear definitions of both unacceptable corruption and unacceptable Putinism. The political process in Bulgaria in recent years and months has provided enough examples of how almost all major parties have been accused of corruption and/or Putinism, and sometimes been politically ostracised on this basis. This increases the instability of the parliamentary configuration.

The political debates lead to the following picture of the 51st National Assembly, outlined by five paradoxes. There are two dominant political forces, GERB-UDF and PP-DB, which are antagonists and embody the current political clash in the country. Nevertheless, there is a widespread belief, and it is somewhat justified, that a sustainable government majority would be difficult to form without the participation of both. There is one party, MRF-NB, whose leader Delyan Peevski is believed to set the political agenda and guide the behaviour of a significant number of the parties through the pressure of scandals, financial instruments and proxy figures. Nevertheless, MRF-NB has only 30 MPs and at the moment there is no parliamentary party ready to publicly cooperate with it. There are two formations, the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) and "There is Such a People" ("Ima Takuv Narod" - ITN), considered relatively acceptable as secondary participants in a government majority due to their greater cooperativeness and tendency to negotiate with others. Nevertheless, the two formations are in a blazing conflict with each other, intensified by the competition of their respective candidates for Speaker of Parliament Natalia Kiselova and Silvi Kirilov. There are two more formations, treated by everyone as relatively unacceptable for governing majorities, the Alliance for Rights and Freedoms (ARF) and "Morality, Unity, Honour" ("Moral, Edinstvo, Chest" - MECh). Nevertheless, both have repeatedly given their support to candidates of other parties without raising any preconditions. There is also one party, "Vazrazhdane" ("Revival"), which each party categorically states is excluded a priori from potential interactions. Nevertheless, all parties repeat that the political events are working in favour of "Vazrazhdane".

The "Natalia Kiselova" denouement? The 11th attempt to elect a speaker of parliament proved to be successful. The BSP candidate Natalia Kiselova won, supported not only by her party, but also by GERB, PP-DB and ARF. Kiselova is undoubtedly a successful solution. As a specialist in constitutional law and an expert in parliamentary procedure, she probably has the best expertise compared to all the other candidates. Kiselova's moderate style is also an advantage in a fragmented parliament. Her election with 140 votes

"in favour", which also marked the first real majority behind any decision in this National Assembly, raised questions as to whether the "Kiselova majority" could be a starting point for a future government majority.

The answer for the time being is rather negative. To a great extent, Kiselova's election is the product of complex manoeuvres and shifts without prior planning and without projected consequences. Initially, Kiselova benefited only from the votes of BSP, which is the fifth political force. Later, when it became clear that the two leading formations, GERB and PP-DB ("We Continue the Change" – "Produlzhavame Promianata" – Democratic Bulgaria), would not be able to nominate a parliamentary speaker, because the other parties were not willing to give them the initiative in the political process, the time came for the small formations. Having received an unexpected chance, they began to change their starting tactics. ITN withdrew their candidate Nikoleta Kuzmanova and proposed Silvi Kirilov, arguing that he was the oldest MP and in this sense met a non-partisan criterion for support. BSP publicly expressed reservations about whether to keep Kiselova, but ultimately stuck with their nomination. GERB's support for Kiselova came after it became clear that Silvi Kirilov could receive a majority, and GERB would remain outside of it. And the support of PP-DB came after the internal division in the coalition over Kirilov and the intention to demonstrate unity, possible only in relation to another candidate.

Natalia Kiselova's very first steps in her new role have intimated more serious political ambitions. They are already apparent on a rhetorical level with her inaugural speech, in which, like Churchill, she spoke of "sweat and tears". But they can also be seen in the numerous political meetings she initiated almost immediately after the election, as well as in public statements, for example, in the expressed hope that the parliament will be able to adopt the law on the state budget before the New Year despite the short deadline, or that the filling of parliamentary quotas in a number of institutions should begin despite other priorities. In both cases, we are talking about a political agenda of her own, which in no way enjoys consensus in the National Assembly.

Political and expert analyses have already regularly promoted Kiselova as the most likely future caretaker Prime Minister in the event of it being impossible to form a regular cabinet. Her affiliation with BSP and the biography of an expert in the presidential administration seem to make her a logical choice for President Radev. However, it would be wrong to automatically consider Kiselova as "Radev's figure". After her election, both ITN and MECh accused her of secret cooperation with Peevski. On the 10th attempt to elect a chairperson, MRF-NB, having previously refused

support for any of the candidates, surprisingly voted for Kiselova. Of course, it could be argued that this move is intended to compromise Kiselova's alleged commitment to the "sanitary cordon" against Peevski. On the 11th – successful - attempt, however, the MRF-NB did not repeat their vote and did not compromise the election itself, even though they could have done. A few days later, Kiselova herself stated that she did not support Radev's decision not to invite MRF-NB to consultations on forming a government. It is too early to draw any conclusions, but it can be said that at least publicly, Kiselova is trying not to appear to be part of anyone's political camp.

The government. Dimitar Glavchev's cabinet remained heavily shadowed by suspicions that it was biased in favour of GERB and especially in favour of MRF-NB. Glavchev referred to international assessments that took into account the good organisation of the elections, but Bulgarian public opinion for the most part is of the opposite opinion. The numerous data on electoral manipulations, the requests submitted for partial cancellation of the vote, and the started recount of ballots in one sixth of the polling stations contribute to this belief. The suggestion that there is a parliamentary party, MRF-NB, a significant part of whose result can be explained by corporate and purchased votes allowed without hindrance by the institutions, has also been widely circulated.

We should also add examples from current government practice. As insignificant as they may be in themselves, the cabinet's decisions to grant additional financial subsidies to municipalities controlled mainly by GERB and MRF-NB, and to quickly provide a large state property for the MRF-NB headquarters, reinforce the general impression.

The draft state budget for 2025 submitted by the cabinet deserves special attention. The calculations for an increase in revenue and expenditure by about 20 billion leva each compared to the previous year have been the subject of significant criticism from both politicians and experts. Accusations have emerged that the parameters set are unrealistic and serve the social populism of the major parties, which have decided to diminish public discontent with generous spending.

The President. The head of state deepened his acute confrontation with the leader of the MRF-NB, Delyan Peevski. The party was not invited to the consultations on forming a government. With this act, Rumen Radev suggests that he does not accept the election results of the MRF-NB as legitimate. Inevitably, disputes arise regarding the constitutional

legitimacy of such behaviour. In any case, it receives serious public support.

The consultations themselves did not produce any significant news. The political forces repeated their usual arguments. Overall, Radev seems inclined to give a chance to some negotiations for a regular government. In the configuration determined by the blockage of the election of a parliamentary speaker, it is clear that the dialogue would only have a chance with an advance of a few weeks before the first provisional mandate is handed over.

The Prosecutor's Office. A political activation of the Prosecutor's Office can be observed, provoking accusations of direct interference in the political process. Doubts are also raised by the fact that the activation occurred after the procedure for the election of Borislav Sarafov took on an irreversible character. The Prosecutor's Office requested the immunity of the co-chair of PP Kiril Petkov in connection with the illegal arrest of GERB leader Boyko Borisov in 2022, charged an associate of the other co-chair of PP Asen Vassilev for influence peddling, and plotted to remove the immunity of PP MP Lena Borislavova for document fraud. The political significance of these three actions is clear. The legitimacy of PP as an expression of the fight against corruption is being attacked and the chance of government negotiations between PP and GERB is being undermined. The coincidence with the positions of Delyan Peevski is significant and difficult to interpret in any other way than what is obvious.

The Constitutional Court. The institution is burdened with very high expectations to resolve the political crisis in Bulgaria. Two cases filed with the Court are of the most delicate nature. The first concerns the recount of votes from the last elections. If it comes to annulment, it will not only affect the relative parliamentary weight of one party or another, it will almost certainly change the entire parliamentary configuration, with all the resulting risks for the government negotiations and the legitimacy of the 51st National Assembly in general. The second case attacks the constitutional changes and in particular the obligation for the President to choose an caretaker Prime Minister from a short list of candidates. If it comes to annulment of the contested texts, Rumen Radev may suddenly acquire extremely broad, and publicly legitimate, tools to influence the political process.

Usually, the practice of the Constitutional Court does not meet these high expectations. Constitutional judges do not like to take responsibility for the mistakes and crimes of political forces. Regardless of this, attention is necessarily directed towards them.

3

THE STATE OF THE PARTY SYSTEM

GERB-UDF. The first political force entered the 51st National Assembly with the expectations that it should propose a regular government, but also with the conviction that it did not have the resources and trust to achieve it. From the very beginning, GERB leader Boyko Borisov had to find a solution to two challenges that were difficult to make compatible. The first stemmed from the PP-DB declaration of a “sanitary cordon” against Delyan Peevski, and the second from Peevski’s pressure to move towards new elections. For a number of reasons, which some commentators explain with dependencies, Borisov could not form a government in opposition to Peevski. At the same time, he is aware that a government with Peevski’s official participation would be catastrophic for him, and not just in terms of image, but also as a risk that Peevski would take control of the entire government and use the instruments of power against his partner.

Borisov resorted to his usual wait-and-see tactic. He left the immediate post-election statements of most parties that a coalition with GERB could not be formed almost without comment. At the opening of the National Assembly, he also launched the only realistic format for a governing majority: GERB, PP-DB, BSP and ITN. Without at least one of the first two, a majority cannot be formed. “Vazrazhdane” are excluded a priori. MECh have excluded themselves. A coalition with MRF-NB is extremely undesirable. A coalition with ARF would be too dangerous a challenge to MRF-NB. Third, Borisov, who was aware that he could not impose his own speaker on parliament, made sure that the election could not take place without him and that everyone understood this. Fourth, after all the official statements by PP-DB that a coalition with Borisov could not take place without him signing the declaration on the “sanitary cordon”, he managed to separate his partners and start negotiations only with DB. And fifth, Borisov managed not to enter into conflict with Peevski by rejecting the “sanitary cordon” and sending questions to the Constitutional Court in line with the attacks against Peevski.

Of course, it does not follow from this that a regular government without Peevski will actually be formed.

The point is that for Borisov, the current option is the most favourable of all the unfavourable options. Judging by the political signals, all of DB, BSP and ITN would compromise under certain conditions. So it really depends on Borisov whether the compromise will become a fact. The first step is accepting not being Prime Minister. It is clear to everyone that if this step is not taken, there is no way the negotiations can continue successfully.

“We Continue the Change (Produlzhavame Promianata) - Democratic Bulgaria” (PP-DB). The coalition’s balance sheet in the new parliament is contradictory. Their undoubted success can be cited as the transformation of the declaration of the “sanitary cordon” into the main topic of the parliamentary and political debate. On the other hand, the symptoms of internal division, quite noticeable as early as in the election campaign, have reached peak values. PP and DB quite clearly stand in different positions, often difficult to reconcile. DB try to emphasise the more characteristic division for them of Euro-Atlanticism-Russophilia. Within its framework, cooperation with GERB is permissible. PP, on the contrary, insist on the division that gave rise to them, namely corruption-anti-corruption, making a dialogue with GERB as difficult as possible. On this basis, the two formations split on the topic of electing a speaker of parliament. DB did not want to support Silvi Kirilov because of the parallel support of the “Russophiles” from Vazrazhdane. PP, on the contrary, supported him as a counterweight to Borisov’s “corruption” model. Then the political helplessness of PP became apparent, as they were unable to exclude the “dissidents” from their ranks, Daniel Lorer and Yavor Bozhankov, who voted together with DB against Kirilov, from the parliamentary group. While DB insisted on an inquiry commission against Russian influence, PP concentrated their efforts on proposals for a new law on the judiciary. The internal division was also successfully exploited by factors outside the coalition. GERB, for example, continued to actively repeat that it was possible to work with DB, but not with PP. The culmination for now is the decision of DB to enter into talks with GERB for a government, and for PP to abstain.

At this stage, we cannot speak of an imminent official split of PP-DB, although the indications are not small. The attitude towards Boyko Borisov has always divided this political community at critical moments. But there is also a precedent in it for a coalition to formally remain, only for one part of it to remain in the government while another part votes against it. Such was the situation of the Reformist Bloc in the “Borisov 2” cabinet in 2016. In any case, the “rupture” in the unity of PP-DB is now present and cannot be concealed.

“Vazrazhdane” (“Revival”). The party is officially isolated from cabinet negotiations. However, this does not prevent it from occupying a key place in the political process. Other formations, most notably the two main ones GERB and PP-DB, justify their actions with the need to prevent collaboration with “Vazrazhdane”. In a negative way, this strengthens the party’s propaganda for an “alternative to the status quo”. Fears of a new refugee wave (for example, in connection with the crisis in Syria), cultural conflicts in Bulgarian society (for example, on the occasion of an “anti-Bulgarian” performance at the National Theatre in Sofia), and international processes (for example, suggestions of a change in American policy towards Europe and hopes for another breakthrough by “Alternative for Germany” in the upcoming Bundestag elections) are an additional factor in favour of Kostadin Kostadinov’s formation.

Movement for Rights and Freedoms – New Beginning (MRF-NB). The party in this form made an aggressive debut in the National Assembly and quickly became the focus of the problem of forming a government. Delyan Peevski quickly realised that in this parliament there was no way his party could officially enter a government. That is why he declared that there should be immediate pre-term elections, convinced that they would be in his interest, would increase the absolute and relative proportion of votes for MRF-NB and would make his party an inevitable partner in a future parliament. It is clear that Peevski is not in a position to overcome the “sanitary cordon” in the 51st National Assembly. Even his decision to give up the post of deputy speaker and leadership positions in parliamentary committees, which effectively invalidated the “cordon”, did not have a positive effect.

The difficult relations of MRF-NB with the other parliamentary parties propel Delyan Peevski towards a different type of political goals. Apart from that, his ambition to embody Euro-Atlanticism cannot be adequately realised in the current parliamentary format, in which the two leading formations declare the same values every day. This is why Peevski has intensified his clash with President Radev to the extreme. As the most popular political figure in the country, Radev is an opponent who positions Peevski higher than the

complex 8-party parliamentary debate. It is no coincidence that Peevski spoke about the need for a “new beginning” in the country, not only in MRF. Judging by his and his party colleagues’ statements, he imagines a transition to a new bipolar model, in which he and Radev express both poles, and the other parties must find their place around them.

Bulgarian Socialist Party – United Left (BSP-UL).

The fifth political force seems to have something to congratulate itself on: two of the three most important positions in the country, the president and the speaker of the National Assembly, are held by politicians nominated by BSP. At the same time, there is still a lack of a clear political direction that could lead the left out of its current unenviable niche. There is good and bad news for the current BSP leadership. Both are directly or indirectly related to former chairwoman Korneliya Ninova. The good news is that Ninova has publicly announced her intention to create a new party, which practically admits her failure to regain control of BSP. The bad news is that the compromising behaviour of the left, oriented towards a possible partnership with GERB, is on the way to eradicating one of the few moral assets of BSP under Ninova’s leadership. The leadership does indeed rule out the idea of a “political coalition” with GERB, but it just as clearly does not rule out participation in a general governing majority. Amidst the accusations of Ninova’s entourage that BSP has become Delyan Peevski’s “fifth column”, the connection with GERB may intensify the negative effect.

The BSP congress and direct election for chairperson are imminent, which will undoubtedly engage the party’s attention over the next two and a half months. Along with the expected candidacies of the acting chairman Atanas Zafirov and the chairman of the parliamentary group Borislav Gutsanov, a “Trumpist” declaration for leadership in the form of “making BSP strong again” was made by the former leader of the Sofia organisation Kaloyan Pargov. The activity of MEP Kristiyan Vigenin should not be underestimated. Nor should the dangers of internal tension. It seems that the party, focused on the leadership battle, is not sufficiently using the chances that the election of Natalia Kiselova as head of the National Assembly opens up.

Alliance for Rights and Freedoms (ARF). The party of former MRF leader Ahmed Dogan has failed to develop a political image or demonstrate an ability for political initiative. This apparent helplessness does not yet give it any perspective in the competition with MRF-NB.

“There is such a people” (“Ima Takuv Narod” - ITN).

Slavi Trifonov’s party managed to stand in the centre of political attention with their candidacy for the post of Speaker of Parliament. Surprisingly, it turned out that

Silvi Kirilov could become an integrator for diverse support, united by resistance to the influence of Delyan Peevski in Bulgarian politics. For a party like ITN, pejoratively called in the past “the little MRF”, this achievement is not to be sniffed at. Moreover, despite Kirilov’s ultimate failure, ITN continue to be seen as a cooperative formation that may contribute more to restricting than escalating political tensions.

“Morality, Unity, Honour” (“Moral, Edinstvo, Chest” - MECh). On the very first day of parliament, MECh, which is the only completely new parliamentary group, declared that they would not participate in negotiations for a government and that they would not nominate a candidate for parliamentary speaker,

and a few days later announced that they would withdraw their support for other competing candidates. In this way, MECh isolated themselves from the parliamentary debate and practically fell out of the media stream. The self-nomination of party leader Radostin Vassilev as a future interior minister was intended to consolidate his thesis about the need to fight against the “Borisov-Peevski” model, but this thesis was lost in the shadow of the PP-DB’s more powerful rhetoric about the “sanitary cordon”. MECh is counting on the fact that in the next elections they could gather even greater support as a “new alternative”, but for now this has a chance to happen only through informal channels, outside the conventional political process in which they are absent.

4

MAIN CONCLUSIONS AND FORECASTS

The global processes related to the US presidential elections have fuelled both hopes and fears for a change in the political environment in Bulgaria towards more conservatism and more nationalism. Here, not only the extravagant opinions that the White House and the State Department will arrange a new Bulgarian regular government should be noted, but also the assessments that the agenda is changing. Figuratively speaking, many are convinced that it is becoming increasingly important who in Sofia has a dialogue with Budapest, and not with Brussels.

The prospect of a way out of the political crisis, however, remains distant. As before, there is no other realistic combination for a governing majority than the GERB – PP-DB (or parts of PP-DB) – BSP – ITN format. A separate issue, which is far from unimportant, is the formula for such a majority – an immediate coalition, a complex structure of bilateral agreements between GERB and other parties, a minority cabinet, or something of a fourth kind. The start of the negotiations is late, but it can be seen as a positive sign.

The PP-DB declaration of a “sanitary cordon” against the leader of the MRF-NB Delyan Peevski played the role of a spotlight that illuminated the real and behind-the-scenes political interactions. PP-DB actually pointed at the “elephant in the room”. Sufficient arguments have been proposed in favour of the thesis that at this stage Peevski is “clogging up” the political process in Bulgaria. A stable regular government without him is almost impossible, whilst with him it is again almost impossible. It remains to be understood

whether this “almost” reflects a temporary situation or a permanent characteristic of the political system. Whether a cabinet can still be formed within the framework of the 51st National Assembly depends on two factors – the will of Boyko Borisov and the will of Delyan Peevski. At the moment, we cannot be sure whether Peevski really wants new elections at any cost, or is inclined to a short postponement in order to accumulate greater political power. As for Borisov, he has on his side the tacit “anti-election” coalition, made up of most parties that do not want to risk another vote in the early spring. The outcome is not yet predetermined.

There are four threads in the story that nuance the Borisov-Peevski relationship. First, Peevski’s conflict with President Rumen Radev clearly goes beyond Borisov and aims for a large-scale political transformation. Peevski undoubtedly has an interest in attacking the highest-rated politician, just as Radev benefits from attacking the most hated politician. In this case, they illustrate the political principle of Pascal’s law, popular in Bulgaria many years ago amid the mutual tension between MRF and nationalists. Second, the election of Natalia Kiselova as Speaker of Parliament is not an insignificant fact. She could play a more important role in these processes than would appear at first glance. Third and fourth, the Constitutional Court’s schedule is becoming a primary factor. “Time bombs”, which would undoubtedly be a partial annulment of the elections or the return of official power to the President, could go off and rearrange the political stakes, but they could also remain only hypothetical.

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Further information on the topic can be found here:
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