

DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

# POLIT-BAROMETER

Year 24 Issue 5  
May 6<sup>th</sup> - 31<sup>st</sup>

**Boris Popivanov**



The Bulgarian commitment to the cause of Ukraine in the war with Russia is increasing.



The election campaign is going against the backdrop of revenge of the "status quo" against the "change".



A government with a leading role of GERB is the most likely alternative to more early elections.

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## 1

## THE DYNAMICS OF FOREIGN POLICY

**The war in Ukraine.** The Bulgarian caretaker government has on several occasions reaffirmed the complete continuity of the country's foreign policy regarding the war in Ukraine. In an online conversation, Prime Minister Dimitar Glavchev assured his Ukrainian colleague Denis Shmihal that Bulgaria's support for Ukraine remains "staedfast". The Council of Ministers decided on the country's participation in the Fund for the Reconstruction of Ukraine established by the European Union (EU). Bulgaria also firmly stood behind the Global Peace Meeting planned by the Western allies in June in Switzerland. Minister of Defence Atanas Zapryanov emphasised to his Ukrainian colleague Rustem Umerov that Bulgarian military aid to Ukraine will continue, and Minister of Energy Vladimir Malinov expressed to his Ukrainian colleague German Galushchenko Bulgaria's readiness to assist in restoring Ukraine's energy system damaged by the bombings.

Probably the most intense expression of Bulgaria's commitment to Kyiv was the meeting of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly held in Sofia. The resolution of this meeting gave the green light to the use of Western weapons by Ukraine on the territory of Russia. Undoubtedly, this is a new stage in the escalation of tensions between Moscow and the West. It is true that the final decision will need to be taken at the NATO Summit in Washington, but the direction of development is obvious. The world media hardly covered the Sofia resolution. The reason should probably be sought in the intention to announce the big news at a later stage. However, the symbolism is important. The first institutionalised message of this nature has come not from elsewhere, but from Bulgaria, the country usually suspected of sympathising with the Russian cause. The latest sociological survey of "Eurobarometer", announced a little earlier, also presents Bulgaria as the country where military aid to Ukraine finds the lowest support in the EU - 32% compared with the 60% average for the entire Union.

The Bulgarian point of view is, indeed, not without nuances. The alternative diplomacy of President Rumen Radev is proof of this. In a short period of time, he visited Budapest, where he met with Hungarian

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, and Rome, where he paid his traditional visit to Pope Francis, and also commented on the assassination attempt on Slovakian Prime Minister Robert Fico. In all three cases, Radev spoke about the need for peace in Ukraine, without setting the condition for a military victory over Russia. Orbán, Fico and Pope Francis, it should be recalled, are among the most influential voices in Europe in support of a peaceful resolution of the conflict. The anti-war rhetoric of the Bulgarian President is not surprising, taking into account his statements so far, nor does it essentially dispute the official position of Sofia, but it can be defined as an important fact against the background of the general uncertainty about exactly what steps the West should take in the new phase of the Russian offensive in Ukraine.

**Energy diplomacy with the US.** The caretaker cabinet continued the trend towards deepening energy contacts with the US. The deliveries of American nuclear fuel to the nuclear power plant in Kozloduy have officially begun. Negotiations for the construction of blocks 7 and 8 of the power plant by the American company Westinghouse are at an advanced stage, and the subject of discussion is the signing of a loan to finance the project. During the visit of Energy Minister Vladimir Malinov to Washington, the possibilities of purchasing American liquefied gas were discussed. There are two important messages from the meetings. One is related to Malinov's warning that Russian gas continues to enter Bulgaria through intermediaries and ways must be found to bring this practice to an end. The other concerns the need to strengthen the so-called Vertical gas corridor that will strengthen America's energy presence in the region. On the whole, it can be claimed that Malinov is becoming a key political figure in the context of Bulgarian-American relations.

**The "Skopje" case.** There has been a new escalation of relations between Bulgaria and North Macedonia. The reason for this is the change of power in Skopje. After a long political dominance of the Social Democrats, the parliamentary elections were convincingly won by VMRO-DPMNE, and their candidate Gor-

dana Siljanovska was elected President. The leader of the winning coalition, Hristijan Mickoski, made the provocative statement that he was waiting for a more accommodating Prime Minister in Sofia to talk to him, while President Siljanovska refused to call her country "North Macedonia" and called it simply "Macedonia". The reactions of the Bulgarian political parties were markedly critical. However, the situation confirmed the international authority of the Bulgarian President Rumen Radev, who invariably repeated that Skopje was not ready for EU membership, unlike other political players who insisted on concessions on the part of Bulgaria. Now these players have nothing to say, because, amongst other things, they adhere to the European position, initially skeptical of VMRO-DPMNE. Radev's point of view was actually supported by Greece and the European Commission. The incident in which the birthplace of the famous Bulgarian writer Dimitar Talev in the North Macedonian town of Prilep was almost destroyed became a specific symbol of the looming new "freeze". The discussions about the purchase of this house and its future purpose fall into the context of a moderate nationalist agenda, whose most prominent spokesperson is precisely President Radev. The tension between the government, which seemed unable to do anything about it, and civil activist and politician Manol Peykov, who managed to purchase the house, is unlikely to blow over quickly.

**The "Srebrenica" case.** A political scandal has arisen on the occasion of the imminent 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Srebrenica massacre in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which marked one of the darkest pages of the Yugoslav wars. The UN General Assembly prepared and adopted a resolution that again recognised the events in Srebrenica as genocide. Bulgaria supported the resolution, but subsequently investigative sites published

documents that Prime Minister Glavchev had instructed the country's permanent representative to the UN to abstain. There were accusations that Glavchev's behaviour was due to instructions from GERB leader Boyko Borisov, who was under pressure from Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic. Vucic himself openly hinted in a television interview that he expected a different decision from Bulgaria. The election campaign quickly added geopolitical dimensions to the case. Once again, some of the political forces contested Borisov's sincere Euro-Atlanticism, convinced that he was ready to sacrifice Bulgaria's European loyalty for his close contacts with Vucic and the pro-Serbia Russian President Vladimir Putin. We are witnessing a new phase of the battle over which of the leading parties in Bulgaria is the authentic exponent of the position for Euro-Atlantic values.

**The election of a patriarch in the context of foreign policy.** Ambitions to use foreign policy factors for domestic national goals seem to be evident in the procedure for electing a new head of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. With an official message, the Moscow Patriarchate denounced senior Bulgarian clerics for allowing joint ministry with representatives of the canonically unrecognised Orthodox Church of Ukraine. A central role is played by Metropolitan Nikolay of Plovdiv, who some time ago withdrew his candidacy for Bulgarian patriarch, but the steadfastness of his intention today raises doubts. His opponents accuse him of seeking the support of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and American interests allegedly close to him in order to control the Bulgarian Church. These processes portend an ecclesiastical crisis because they involve secular circles with their plans and appetites in an already complex dispute about the future of the Church.

## 2

## INSTITUTIONS AND THE AGENDA OF SOCIETY

**The election campaign.** Towards the end of the official campaign for the National Assembly and European Parliament elections on June 9<sup>th</sup>, certain conclusions can be drawn about the nature of the political process.

The campaign turned out to be a collection of parallel campaigns by the parties, aimed primarily at their core voters and potential narrow fringes. The strategy to “regain” votes lost in recent months and years at the expense of “winning” new ones is obvious. In the sixth parliamentary elections in just 3 years, it seems that the imagination of the parties has run out. The local elections in Sofia in autumn last year gave an impetus to the creation of two new formations – “Solidarna Bulgaria” and “Blue Bulgaria” - but the general impression is of the same persons as before.

The campaign turned out to be a dirty one, at least, dirtier than the previous ones. The media space was dominated by compromising revelations about some of the political players and by illegal recordings of their representatives. All this is able to repel some of the hesitant voters and contribute to a relatively low turnout on election day.

The leading dilemma of the campaign can be defined as “a new chance for change” versus “the end of experiments”. In this sense, the party stake in the upcoming elections is formed by the opposition of two political blocs - GERB-UDF and the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF), on one hand, and “We Continue the Change (Produlzhavame Promianata) - Democratic Bulgaria” (PP-DB), from another. In an international context, the two warring blocs have no fundamental differences and are equally seeking to legitimise themselves through Euro-Atlantic loyalty.

Euro-Atlantic loyalty takes on added weight in light of the MEP vote coinciding with the parliamentary elections. It is usually assumed that the European vote falls in the shadow of the national agenda. This is undoubtedly the case even now, but it can be claimed that in no campaign for a European Parliament in Bulgaria has there been so much talk about Europe. The effort of the parties to tie the future of

national politics to “decisions made in Brussels” is noticeable. Despite the fact that the leading participants are unequivocally determined to support the EU in its current form, the campaign as a whole is dominated, for the first time in history, by critical evaluations of the Union. They come from the nationalist party “Vazrazhdane” (“Revival”) and to some extent the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), but they are gaining wide popularity. We are talking about topics such as migration waves to the EU, the protection of national interests in the Union, the possible disappearance of the principle of unanimity when making foreign policy decisions, the deficits of the Green Deal and the perspective of entire regions in Bulgaria, the risks of the potential creation of a European army, the tension between Europe and Russia, etc.

In electoral terms, the trends formed in the month of the “pre-campaign” seem to be confirmed. Despite certain discrepancies, sociological studies point in the same direction. No less important, the mainstream media legitimises this picture and makes it self-evident. There are several dominant hypotheses. A decisive victory of GERB is expected, perhaps even with the largest percentage distance in front of the second participant since 2014. There are two intrigues. One is related to the second place, for which there are three potential candidates: PP-DB; MRF; and “Vazrazhdane”. The other intrigue is the number of parties in the parliament. It is assumed that the same 6 parties that participated in the 49<sup>th</sup> will enter the 50<sup>th</sup> National Assembly, with the only doubts being about whether a seventh formation is possible, most probably “Solidarna Bulgaria”.

The media picture rather limits the chances of “Solidarna Bulgaria” to become the bearer of a social alternative. The suggestion that “Solidarna Bulgaria” is a mirror image of “Blue Bulgaria” is circulating, that both represent the radical wings of the old left and the old right, respectively, and in this sense tend towards the marginal niches in the political space.

**The National Assembly.** During the campaign, the Bulgarian Parliament is functioning as a pre-election

tribune of the political parties. Most of the time it is on vacation, so it does not fulfill its role as a legislator. At the same time, the parties, and especially PP-DB, are trying to involve it in their campaign by initiating extraordinary meetings on various cases, such as the indexation of pensions and the genocide in Srebrenica. The authority of the legislature hardly benefits from such displays.

**The government.** On the whole, the Council of Ministers does not succeed in establishing its institutional authority in the political process. In the struggle for interpretations, those who claim that the cabinet of Dimitar Glavchev primarily reflects the interests of GERB and MRF prevail. This is illustrated both by personnel appointments in the second echelon of executive power, and by specific decisions that seem to come as a response to the wishes of leaders Boyko Borisov and Delyan Peevski. The cabinet actually supported the position of GERB and MRF also on the occasion of the two extraordinary parliamentary sessions dedicated to the indexation of pensions and the "Srebrenica" case. A separate issue is that the process of "exposing" the government as the institutional facade of these two parties does not necessarily work in favour of the "whistleblowers". It reinforces the feeling that Bulgaria is in transition to being governed exactly by GERB and MRF.

**The President.** The head of state distanced himself from domestic political topics, as is his practice during election campaigns. Along with this, Rumen Radev once again advocated alternative positions to the cabinet and the majority regarding the conflict in Ukraine. The subsequent exchange of remarks between Radev and leading politicians appeared to be full of tension, but in fact it was rather an isolated episode in the

political process. The effort of political parties and leaders to comment on the presidential institution as little as possible is impressive. It is difficult to judge whether this is just a pre-election tactic designed to avoid defocusing the individual campaigns. A dispute arose between the cabinet and the President over who should represent Bulgaria at the NATO Summit in Washington - Rumen Radev or Dimitar Glavchev. In the conditions of caretaker cabinets, the President has been the one who has expressed Bulgaria's policy at international fora. However, the current cabinet was elected according to the new constitutional rules and is not subject to the will of the President. The very discussion on the topic suggests longer-term plans to isolate the head of state, and not so much tactical moves. Apparently, the political elite are less worried about Radev's possible political project. From such a perspective, it would be understandable if the parties began to perceive him as a politician entering the second half of his last term, or in other words, as a politician facing his sunset.

**The prosecutor's office.** Acting Chief Prosecutor Borislav Sarafov is definitely strengthening his position. Two events are illustrative. In first place there is the FBI award received by Sarafov in the US, while almost immediately after that comes his visit to EU Attorney General Laura Koveshi. It is known that Sarafov was accused of too close contacts with mafia-type and oligarchic circles. His opponents relied in no small measure on international pressure – American and European – for his removal. Judging by the visible side of things, there is no such pressure. Political trends in Bulgaria, as well as the unclear future of the project for a new Law on the Judiciary, seem to reveal a much longer-term perspective for Sarafov and the current Supreme Judicial Council than many assumed just half a year ago.

## 3

## THE STATE OF THE PARTY SYSTEM

**GERB-UDF.** The entire pre-election behaviour of GERB is modelled in such a way as to send a very clear and unequivocal message – for the return to executive power, and that as a leading political force. For the first time since 2017, GERB's pre-election rhetoric is not based solely on self-promotion of successes and criticism of opponents, but also on specific commitments in government. This is heard both in meetings with voters around the country and in international contacts, for example with representatives from the NATO Parliamentary Assembly or with leading politicians from the German Christian Democratic Union. The participation of the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, in a pre-election rally of GERB in Plovdiv is also an important point for the party in the competition with PP-DB for the benevolence of the European right-wing.

It is not by chance that GERB's pre-election document is not called "pre-election platform", as is accepted, but directly "government programme", which is usually offered after winning elections and a government that has been agreed on. It has reached the point where leader Boyko Borisov has openly discussed the option of him being Prime Minister again, instead of launching a secondary party figure or expert. It is true that this is conditional (a big election victory), but it is still indicative. It can also be seen in the actions of other politicians from GERB. Some of them, for example Daniel Mitov, almost openly advertise themselves as future ministers.

In the government programme mentioned above, it is written that GERB want a full 4-year term and a government with bright political figures, not with an expert background. Connoisseurs of Borisov's flexible style know that everything is preliminary until the election results become clear. So far, several intentions for the period after June 9<sup>th</sup> seem to be visible - a reluctant but inevitable alliance with MRF, and the search for a third small party, avoiding fierce opposition from the PP-DB. The latter constitutes the most delicate aspect of the entire configuration. In his pre-election meetings, Borisov quite directly commented on the factor of the "West". His statements

can be clearly heard in different contexts: from "The West realise that they made a mistake with PP-DB" to "PP-DB must remain the opposition, and one day the West can bring us together again." By all appearances, Borisov is probing the unidentified "West" as to what extent he has the chance to be accepted as a leading representative of Euro-Atlantic politics in Bulgaria.

**"We Continue the Change (Produlzhavame Pro-mianata) - Democratic Bulgaria" (PP-DB).** In two months, the PP-DB suffered a tremendous number of blows, giving rise to the general impression of an uncontrollable downward movement. We can summarise them in several ways.

A series of recordings of conversations between PP leaders from the time of the previous parliamentary elections were leaked to the media. Conversations, with a certain dose of vindictiveness, can be read as indications of illegal financing, influence peddling and corruption. There is nothing fundamentally new about modern Bulgarian history. Many years have passed since the recognition of the honorary chairman of MRF Ahmed Dogan that "every party has its ring of companies". This exposure now has such weight due to the moral claim of PP-DB, because of their legitimising message that they bring a new morality to politics against the background of the corrupt status quo of GERB and MRF.

Political criticism against PP-DB does come from GERB circles, but it comes mostly from MRF circles. Interest is aroused by the statement of MRF co-chairman Delyan Peevski that DB leader Hristo Ivanov offered to support him to become Prime Minister if he would allow him to liquidate and integrate PP. The authenticity of this conversation, contested, though not too decisively, by Ivanov, cannot be confirmed. It is a fact, however, that the efforts for internal disintegration of PP-DB by sowing tension between PP and DB continue.

The tragic incident, in which a car in which the co-chairman of PP Kiril Petkov was travelling, collided with another and a person died in the crash, also actively served to discredit the "forces of change". The



implication in this case is of a different nature, namely that despite all the declarations of "closeness to the people", PP-DB feel untouchable and use the tools of the state for their own private gain.

The government results of PP-DB also give rise to political attacks. GERB tirelessly try to convince the public that PP-DB almost brought the finances of the country to a catastrophe. A scandal also erupted over controversial urban planning decisions of the mayor of the capital, Vasil Terziev. Not only protesting citizens, but also regional mayors from Terziev's formation, such as those in Sredets and Triaditsa, spoke out against these decisions. The impression of "failure in Sofia" is also becoming a component of the "circles in the pre-election build-up".

Against this background, the active campaign of PP-DB can be defined as ill-conceived and poorly focused. There is a lack of messages that are clearly structured and do not lead to confusion. PP-DB try to speak on behalf of some "80% of the Bulgarian people" who do not like the current situation in Bulgaria, but fail to give arguments as to why they are the ones who actually represent them. In their criticism of the current situation, PP-DB continue to be unable to decide for the second month whether they are against the "Borisov-Peevski tandem", whether such a tandem does not exist and they are against Peevski, of whom Borisov is a puppet, or whether they are against the "hidden power" of the entire transition. The political outlook also remains a matter of conjecture. Despite the sociological assessments that PP-DB have a downward electoral trend, there is no comment on a possible transition to the opposition. Key politicians from PP and DB (but not all!) declare that they will not govern with Borisov and Peevski, and have a fundamentally negative attitude towards "Vazrazhdane", BSP and "Ima Takuv Narod" ("There is Such a People") (ITN). This could only mean opposition, just that the subject is persistently avoided.

Twice PP-DB did manage a counterstrike against their opponents, both times on international issues. The first case was related to the "Srebrenica" scandal and the alleged role of Borisov, while the second was connected with the article in the authoritative Brussels publication "Politico" exposing Borisov and Peevski as guardians of the mafia. The furious reactions of GERB and MRF showed that doubts about their sincere Euro-Atlanticism remain a sore subject. The battle there is not over, indeed it is yet to come.

**Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF).** MRF are preparing for their long-term participation in the executive power. And with them, as with GERB, the form of the pre-election document, in this case a manifesto, is indicative. It should be recalled that Mustafa Karadayi was the first leader of the party who failed

to bring it closer to official inclusion in the government, and his replacement with Delyan Peevski was intended to revise the previous ineffective course. GERB is the only realistic major partner in the current situation, and Euro-Atlanticism is the only international legitimation for such a format of interaction. It also behooves us to note the lesson from the stay of MRF in opposition. Despite the cooperation with them in principle, in recent years GERB have always been worried about open interaction with MRF, and the leader Borisov has tried to balance the appetites of MRF with the promotion of various small formations. This is probably the reason why MRF today strive to discredit and marginalise all other political actors in the country. For MRF, obviously, the best option is a political space shared between them and GERB, with the inevitable presence of politically insignificant satellites of each. It is in this light that the attacks against PP-DB assume an additional explanation. MRF clearly want two things: to lead GERB to the impossibility of finding other partners besides them; and to invalidate the sanctions against Delyan Peevski under the Magnitsky Law. The joint appearances of Peevski and Borisov during negotiations with protesters, on one hand, and the meeting of Peevski himself with the ambassadors from the EU, on the other, are details which reinforce this statement.

The cooperation of MRF and GERB does not prevent us from establishing the visible differences in the political styles of Borisov and Peevski. Borisov is slow, waits for the right moment, and seems to be guided by the maxim "keep your friends close and your enemies even closer." Peevski, showing the opposite tendencies, gives the impression of a man who is in a terrible hurry to achieve his goals, and exerts incredible pressure in all directions. His potential success would therefore be due more to fear of pressure than to sober political calculation. Here are the pros and cons of his position. The political ambition is undoubted. It can be taken for granted that it also leads to a higher goal of the party's participation in power, not now, but in the future.

**"Vazrazhdane".** In their campaign "Vazrazhdane" mainly rely on the image created and strengthened over three years and five parliamentary elections of a leading and radical alternative to the entire Bulgarian political elite. In this sense, their campaign has no focus, but opposes all the positions shared by the other parties - on Ukraine, on Gaza, on Robert Fico, etc. The obvious aspiration of "Vazrazhdane" is to become a natural representative of all the disaffected.

**Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP).** Korneliya Ninova's party is trying through the campaign to overcome the image created of disintegration and a downward electoral movement. The leitmotifs of the campaign are focused in three directions: moral, governmental

and pragmatic. From a moral point of view, the message is that only BSP did not mislead the people and did not enter the “assemblage” of the previous parliament. But this pathos rather reveals the isolation of the socialist party. It appears as if BSP are proud that they have not been involved in anything and all the processes have passed them by. From a governmental perspective, Ninova seeks to resurrect her former participation in the Kiril Petkov cabinet as a Golden Age of industry and pensions that can be repeated in a new entry into the executive branch. The obvious objection stands out - that the thesis is not new and was not evaluated by the voters at that very moment, after the end of the “Petkov” cabinet, when the BSP election result fell below the previous one. There are no particular reasons for it to be appraised a year and a half later. It should be noted that the dominant propaganda of GERB and MRF, insisting on “the end of improvisations”, treats the entire period from 2021 onwards as “PP-DB time”, so both the pluses and minuses of the “Petkov” cabinet are seen as being at the expense of PP-DB, not the other participants in the coalition. And from a pragmatic point of view, Ninova and her entourage repeat that left-wing people in Bulgaria should vote only for BSP, because all the other parties presenting themselves as left-wing will not be able to enter the next parliament. Such a message is not without certain motives, but it also puts the Socialist Party in the awkward position of not being able to point to a single ideological and political reason to support them, other than the mathematics of the vote. What is more, “Solidarna Bulgaria”, the other more serious left-wing coalition, has a very clear political agenda and aggressively enforces it, regardless of the generally negative conditions in which it is placed.

The presence of the third coalition, the “Left”, should also be noted. BSP are unable to submerge them completely in their shadow.

At the same time, the public behaviour of BSP is increasingly dominated by conservatism and irrationalism. An illustrative example is the leader Ninova worshipping before the monument of the soothsayer Vanga. The negative attitude of BSP’s European partners from the Party of European Socialists regarding the positions and course of the Bulgarian socialists can no longer be hidden.

“There is Such a People” (“Ima Takuv Narod”) (ITN). Slavi Trifonov’s party reinforces the conservatism of its messages, often dealing with issues such as migration and the rights of the LGBT community. In fact, ITN’s big chance lies in the sociological surveys, the majority of which predict the party’s entry into the next parliament. This very circumstance could become a “self-fulfilling prophecy.” Public opinion polls establish the presence of a considerable number of voters who understand voting as a duty, but cannot accept any of the leading parties for various reasons. Some of these voters will likely choose to vote “I do not support anybody.” Others, however, who want to cast their vote for someone, but do not want their vote to end up in a party without a chance for parliament and thus be lost, could turn to ITN, which, due to their relative youth and incompletely clarified ideological and political profile are not burdened with a number of the negatives of GERB, PP-DB, MRF, “Vazrazhdane” or BSP. Whether such a pragmatic protest vote will place ITN in the 50<sup>th</sup> National Assembly remains to be seen.

## 4

## MAIN CONCLUSIONS AND FORECASTS

Bulgaria adheres firmly to its pro-Ukrainian policy. Despite the unexpected range of Eurosceptic messages for an election campaign in the country, there is no reason to assume that the elections will change this completely consistent line. It is likely that the Bulgarian parties will win if they take into account the alternative arguments of President Rumen Radev. The dynamics of the Ukrainian conflict are such that Bulgarian politics must prepare for different options of behaviour, perhaps as early as this autumn or a little later.

The election campaign itself does not portend a high voter turnout. The question of whether the turnout (of the parliamentary vote) will be higher than the anti-record of April 2023, or whether the downward trend will continue, is of symbolic importance. At this stage, there is a dearth of new “political hopes” as well as events capable of motivating voters. Of course, as in other cases, this is in the interests of the biggest parties with their hard cores.

The election results will determine the scenarios for a future government. Not only will the exact ranking of the parties be important, but also the number of those entering parliament. From now it is clear that at least three of the major parties, GERB, PP-DB and MRF, are declaring ambitions to govern immediately after the elections on June 9<sup>th</sup>. Taking into account the isolation of PP-DB and the negative image of MRF, we can conclude that if there is a regular government in the 50<sup>th</sup> National Assembly, it will almost certainly

be formed with the leading role of GERB. Otherwise, the likelihood of more early elections in the autumn definitely increases.

From now, it is also difficult to predict the formula of a possible regular government - political or expert. The chance of a party representative cabinet is undoubtedly greater. The reason is not so much in the parties' sense of responsibility, as in the leaders' worries that the processes may go on behind their backs if they do not establish institutional control over them. We should take into account the traditional preferences of MRF for an expert cabinet, but even in this formation they seem to consider it more as a step towards direct leadership participation in the government, and not so much as a sustainable political solution.

All these calculations of the leading parties, without exception, ignore any more effective involvement of President Radev in current politics.

In conclusion, it can be added that the ongoing crisis in the left-wing space practically excludes options for a socially sensitive platform of governance. On the contrary, the increasingly obvious turn towards conservatism, even of parties with an undefined political profile until recently, is impressive. It remains to be seen to what extent this will increase the tension between citizens and the political system. Even just one blow, such as the widespread concerns about rising electricity prices in May, reveals how fragile social stability is in the country.

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