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Polit-Barometer

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1.

The Dynamics of Foreign Policy

The activation of regional policy. With the inauguration of the new Bulgarian government, headed by Rumen Radev, the main personal factors in Bulgaria's foreign policy behaviour have become the Prime Minister and President Iliana Yotova, with a more limited – and criticised – role for Foreign Minister Velislava Petrova-Chamova.

The South East European Cooperation Process Summit held in Sofia, which brought together 12 heads of government and state is particularly noteworthy. The forum is one of the few examples of consistency in Bulgarian regional policy over a period of 30 years, expressed in striving for pragmatic economic cooperation beyond political differences.

The danger of an escalation of conflict in relations between Bulgaria and North Macedonia was overcome. Two delicate occasions came up on the agenda: first, the arson of Bulgarian diplomatic cars in Skopje, and second, the speech of the Prime Minister of North Macedonia Hristijan Mickoski in Strumitsa, accusing Bulgaria of blackmail. The alleged intention of the Mickoski cabinet to present Bulgaria as a militant anti-Macedonian factor in the EU did not come to pass due to the calm reaction of the Bulgarian institutions - in the first case, the Foreign Ministry summoned the North Macedonian ambassador to Sofia, and in the second, Prime Minister Radev briefly pointed out that the neighbouring country's problem is not with Bulgaria, but with the European Union (EU), in connection with the membership criteria.

Another important event was the visit of Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan to Sofia. Beyond the specific topics of the talks, Fidan's assessment that bilateral relations are developing in an upward direction is not a product of courtesy, but of the real fact that Bulgaria and Turkey have been two of the Balkan countries with the best understanding in recent decades.

The complicated game with Ukraine. Even during the campaign for the April 19th elections, there were assumptions that Rumen Radev would either establish himself as the "new Orban", the bearer of a pronounced pro-Russian position, or he would retreat from his previous statements and show solidarity with the common European course. In practice, we are observing a more unusual and nuanced option that is not easy to classify. And this option attracts a lot of criticism, in the spirit of the claim that "Radev says one thing in Brussels and another in Sofia", and that he is trying to sit on two chairs at the same time, but perhaps it is good to describe it.

Without claiming to be exhaustive, the following circumstances weigh on one side of the scales. First, Bulgaria participated only

at the ambassadorial level in the Bucharest summit of the B-9 group, which includes the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, and provoked interpretations that the diplomatic gesture was related to the strong anti-Russian positions of some of these countries. Second, Bulgaria did not sign the Gdansk Declaration of the leaders of the Eastern Flank of NATO defining Russia as the "most significant, direct and long-term threat" to security in the Euro-Atlantic area. Third, Bulgaria did not join the initiative of 36 countries and the European Commission to establish an International Tribunal for crimes in Ukraine, aimed directly at Russian President Vladimir Putin. Fourth, Bulgaria expressed reservations to the European Council regarding the prepared 21st package of sanctions against Russia and opposed the planned sanctions against specific individuals, including the Russian Patriarch Kirill and the co-owner of the Lukoil company Vagit Alekperov. Fifth, Bulgaria stated that it would stop the military assistance provided to Ukraine in its war with Russia. And sixth, on domestic grounds, but with a more global resonance, Bulgaria almost directly accused the Ukrainian ambassador in Sofia, Olesya Ivashchuk, of defending the construction of the illegal luxury complex in Baba Alino near Varna.

On the other side of the scales, moves with a different impact can be listed. First, Bulgaria approved the continued operation of the current anti-Russian sanctions package. Second, Bulgaria declared support for Ukraine's accession to the EU. Third, Bulgaria, represented by Radev's majority, refused to cancel the 10-year agreement with Ukraine on security issues signed months ago by the Gyurov cabinet. Fourth, Bulgaria expressed its intention not to stop arms exports to Ukraine. Fifth, Bulgaria proposed to Ukraine to build the Belene nuclear power plant together, so that it would receive the electricity produced by the plant through Romania. Sixth, Bulgaria entered the European Stability Mechanism, popularly known as the Eurozone Rescue Fund, without reservations, thereby taking another step on the path of its integration into the common currency.

The new government's motivation for most of the above decisions has been announced as principled. It is based on Prime Minister Radev's arguments that his government objects to everything that harms the Bulgarian national interest (for example, some of the sanctions, the restrictions on the military-industrial complex that would occur if arms exports to Ukraine were stopped, the disarmament of the army that would occur if military aid were extended, etc.), but also to everything that harms efforts for lasting peace between Russia and Ukraine (for example, the tribunal against Putin or the sanctions against Patriarch Kirill, etc.). Radev adds another argument in defence of the thesis that his policy outlined in this way is not anti-European – that it does not actually

compromise relations between Sofia and Brussels, and this can be illustrated by the decision to allocate a new tranche of funds to Bulgaria under the Recovery and Resilience Plan.

The strange development of Bulgarian-American relations. Contacts between Sofia and Washington, for their part, seem to be shrouded in the greatest mystery. What is visible on the surface is an intensive dialogue in the field of energy and security, but without serious public attention. One can point to the telephone conversations of Prime Minister Radev with President Donald Trump and Defence Secretary Pete Hegsett, as well as his meeting in Sofia with Assistant Secretary of State Arthur Milik; and also the meeting of President Yotova with Trump's personal lawyer Rudolph Giuliani and with the US Ambassador to Greece Kimberly Guilfoyle. It is also not yet clear what can be expected from the nomination of Douglas Holder, known more for his lobbying practice than for his diplomatic experience, as ambassador to Sofia.

The fate of the American military transport planes based at Sofia Airport has become a specific case. Even during the election campaign, they served as something of a bone of contention. Considered part of the American military actions against Iran, they raised concerns that they automatically made Bulgaria a target for Iranian counter-strikes. Upon coming to power,

Radev announced the withdrawal of the planes and raised the issue of American visas for Bulgarian citizens – which exist in violation of the agreements between the EU and the US. The impression created was that Radev was almost offering a deal of “planes for visas”, but this was probably erroneous, because it is well known that the US is not in the habit of trading its military presence in one place or another in the world. The issue of visas was passed over with silence by the American side, but the planes were also withdrawn, without it being unambiguously understood whether this was because of the Bulgarian desire or because of other plans for their deployment. At the same time, the Bulgarian Constitutional Court overturned the decision of the previous National Assembly, which obliged the Council of Ministers to submit for ratification the country's membership in the Peace Council launched by Trump. Both the Court's schedule and the arguments in favour of the specific ruling were predictable and do not seem to have any connection with the political process. In spite of everything, they introduce another ambiguity into the whole situation. Hypotheses have arisen that the moves coming from Sofia represent a kind of reaction to the words of US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who listed Bulgaria among the countries ready to say “yes” even before any request was made to them. In short, the broader context of everything that is happening continues to be characterised by uncertainty.

2.

Development of the political situation

The political signals of the new government. The first actions and statements of the majority of “Progressive Bulgaria” (PB) and their government are important because they reflect both their own political intentions and a response to the expectations of the voters who voted for them with such high confidence on April 19th. On the topic of judicial reform, the ruling party introduced and adopted a new Law on the Judiciary, which blocks the personnel activities of the previous Supreme Judicial Council, deprives the “big wigs” in the system of the authority to re-enter its supreme body, sets a deadline of October for filling the “professional quota” in the Council, and gives the Minister of Justice the opportunity to challenge the decisions of the same Council. If there was an attitude that the government would immediately proceed to elect a new Council or even to amend the Constitution, it has been refuted. The efforts of the opposition from “We Continue the Change” (“Produlzhavame Promianata” - PP) and especially “Democratic Bulgaria” (DB) to impose the idea of a “public quota” made up of nominations from the civil sector have also been rejected. The criticism that there is a lack of “ideas for reform” sounds logical. However, the plans of the PB do not seem to be presented in full.

On the topic of controlling inflation, the results are initially limited with the argument that the market should not be directly affected by administrative measures such as introducing additional regulations, price ceilings or special regimes. The focus is primarily on controlling markups and clarifying pricing. In this regard, a meeting was held between Prime Minister Radev and representatives of large retail chains, where commitments were made for 15% price reductions. The “Basket with Care” initiative was launched, targeting basic consumer goods.

On the topic of the attitude towards the oligarchic model, a key event was the removal of the state security of the leaders of GERB Boyko Borisov and the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF) Delyan Peevski, considered by many to be the faces of this model. The new Interior Minister Ivan Demerdzhiev took on the role of a leading political irritant for Borisov and Peevski. Demerdzhiev implicated Borisov in the selection of companies for road barriers, which gained infamy after tragic incidents, and the former Prime Minister in response threatened him with a lawsuit.

Demerdzhiev also launched checks against MRF representatives in Kardzhali, which led to the questioning of the city’s mayor Erol Myumyun himself, promised to check the legality of Peevski’s property and published data on his unregulated trips to Dubai in the company of constitutional judge Desislava Atanasova. Counter-accusations from the MRF-friendly media against Demerdzhiev of exceeding his powers were not long in coming.

On the topic of the fairness of the electoral process the new Central Election Commission, whose members were nominated by the political forces, began work, with the ambition of creating new and more transparent election rules. Political tension arose from the very beginning after PP and DB contested the formula for representation in the Commission, which awarded two seats to MRF and only one to DB.

On the topic of energy security, the agenda was dictated by the prospects for fuel production at the Burgas refinery of Lukoil. The government dismissed the hitherto special manager Rumen Spetsov and appointed a new one, Evgeni Simeonov, who promised more transparent management. Prime Minister Radev held a meeting with the management of the company Litasco, the intermediate owner of Lukoil’s assets in Bulgaria, to discuss future oil supplies. The Bulgarian government has set itself the goal of avoiding an unfavourable international arbitration for the country in the case of the refinery, and has indicated its decision to reject European sanctions against Lukoil co-owner Alekperov as a step in this direction.

On the subject of “Botaş”, intentions were announced to renegotiate the agreement with the Turkish company, so that this agreement could work effectively for the benefit of Bulgaria. Prime Minister Radev discussed the issue with Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan, although no clear development has yet been achieved. It is believed that “Botaş” is the biggest “stone” in Radev’s “garden” because it represents the most disputed initiative of his caretaker governments, and therefore the one most often defined as his political liability with long-term financial damage to the country.

On the topic of the security services, the impression was created that the new government wants to consolidate its power through staffing decisions in the system. Here we can list the proposals for a new mandate for the head of intelligence Antoan Gechev, the temporary takeover of counterintelligence by Stancho Stanev with the prospect of returning the previously released Plamen Tonchev, and the retention of Emil Tonev at the head of the security service.

The draft budget for 2026. The Minister of Finance, Galab Donev, submitted, and the Council of Ministers approved the draft state budget for 2026. For many reasons, the decision was expected with great attention and interest. Firstly, Bulgaria had been operating for half a year without an adopted budget, in conditions of extending the validity of that of last year, but in a completely different economic and financial situation. Secondly, there was the unprecedented circumstance of a country entering the eurozone with a financial framework created for a differ-

ent currency. Thirdly, all this was developing in the context of the excessive deficit procedure launched by the European Commission against Bulgaria, or in other words, a finding of violation of the very criterion that allowed effective membership in the eurozone just a few months ago. And fourthly, the budget is usually perceived as the most important law for any majority, synthesising its priorities in governance.

Donev's project envisages a deficit of 5.7% and the possibility of accumulating new state debt of up to 10 billion euros, as well as a number of measures to control and discipline public spending with the ambition of reducing the deficit below the 3% threshold within two years. The parameters set out in the project were justified by the legacy of previous administrations, embodied in the so-called "hidden invoices", expenses that were planned much earlier, but now have to be implemented. From this perspective, the Finance Minister described his proposal as a "budget of reality". An unusual moment here was his claim that in the project there are no policies of the new majority, which will only find a place in the budget for the next year 2027. The position that the budget is "temporary" came to preemptively limit attempts to assess the majority according to the principles of its budget philosophy.

The project sparked a heated political discussion, which could be summarised with three major points of emphasis: (1) inher-

ited waste according to the ruling party, (2) lack of reforms according to the opposition, and (3) a postponed crisis according to some experts and employers. The political reactions of the other parliamentary forces, with the exception of MRF, who remained silent, were markedly negative. GERB saw in the budget a "total lack of reforms", DB compared it to the budgets of the crisis and hyperinflation from the time of the government of Zhan Videnov, PP described it as "scandalous", and "Vazrazhdane" called it a "complete catastrophe". Although for different reasons and with different nuances, employers and unions also expressed criticism of the government's proposals, with the Industrial Capital Association reaching a complete rejection. The expert debates in the media can hardly be summarised briefly, but they brought to the fore mostly critical and negative observations - doubts that such large capital expenditures are necessary; concerns that the violation of the Maastricht criterion for the deficit ceiling is being permanently legalised; distrust that the social security changes for civil servants will have a fiscal effect; convictions that there is increasing inflationary pressure.

Even before the final vote on the budget, it can be seen that the ruling PB have no well-intentioned partners among the other parliamentary forces, and that despite the resounding victory in the elections of April 19th, the public environment has not become favourable to the party in power.

3.

State of the party system

“Progressive Bulgaria” (PB). Rumen Radev’s political formation, which won the elections decisively, was officially registered by the court as a political party with Radev as its chairman. The statutory rules do not yet provide for broad party bodies. There are no surprises in the leadership, where mostly figures from Radev’s close circle find their places. However, a certain principle of separation of party and government power can be established, expressed in the fact that only two of the ministers (Galin Donev and Ivan Shishkov) are represented in the Executive Council of the party.

Of course, the constitution of a party requires more time. For this reason the manifestations of an unconvincing communication policy are probably understandable at first. A number of statements by party figures, targeting topics such as motherhood, pensions, culture, were easily misinterpreted and turned into a media weapon against the competence of those newly in power, and in some cases were supplemented with the classic suspicions of nepotism for Bulgaria.

GERB-UDF. The strategy of the second political force can currently be described as “soft opposition”. In the parliamentary and media debate, criticisms are being made from expert positions towards the government, with the most prominent presence being that of former Finance Minister Temenuzhka Petkova regarding the draft budget. Leader Boyko Borisov has reserved for himself the right to be the only spokesperson of his party for positive assessments, directed for the most part personally at Prime Minister Radev.

The issue of the presidential elections in the autumn inevitably enters the agenda of GERB. Once again over the years, Borisov has spoken about a joint candidacy with the right-wing parties, but with the clarification that this does not mean automatic support for a PP or DB candidate. At the same time, the party is encouraging rumours that a mutually acceptable candidate with PB, such as lawyer Daniel Valchev, is possible. It is significant that GERB’s small coalition partner, the Union of Democratic Forces, officially expressed support for Valchev. It is an old practice of Borisov, when he does not see a clear positive perspective for himself, to postpone decision-making and send political signals in all directions simultaneously.

The presidential race is also related to the problem of consolidating GERB. A party accused of being clientelist would undoubtedly have difficulties with its clients in the presence of a new government. The decision of Delyan Dobrev, a key figure for GERB, to leave parliament and politics is partly indicative; the disputes and mutual accusations in the second largest local

structure, that of Plovdiv, also are. There is a feeling that Borisov is increasingly distancing himself from the “old” GERB, from the party during its great rise, which has been explained more than once by mobilisation and discipline. The leadership of the parliamentary group in the current parliament, the nominations for leadership of parliamentary committees, as well as the media spokespersons generally represent, with the exception of Tomislav Donchev, political figures who joined GERB late and are closer to the leader than to the structures, and in the ongoing process of party realignment in Bulgaria, this could prove to be a minus.

“We Continue the Change” (“Produlzhavame Promianata” - PP) and “Democratic Bulgaria” (DB). We are examining the two formations together despite their decision to separate into separate parliamentary groups because they continue, first, to follow a similar policy towards the government, and second, to maintain, at least for now and, at least publicly, a “civilised divorce”, without mutual accusations.

PP and DB share the role of the fiercest critics of Radev’s government, escalating to the point of suggestions of an impending political crisis, which in fact does not exist. The belief is being instilled that the new government is almost on the verge of collapse - indicative in this sense are the words of the PP leader Asen Vassilev that Radev is facing a “December scenario”, i.e. protests similar to those that brought down the Zhelyazkov cabinet at the end of last year. If we exclude parliamentary practices such as calls for resignation and requests for a vote of no confidence, a comprehensive denial of the current government is prevalent. This unfolds in three directions: first, in foreign policy (accused of not being pro-European and turning Bulgaria into a second Hungary from the time of Viktor Orbán); then, in budget policy (challenged for not cutting important expenses); and finally, in justice policy (stigmatised for not dismantling the oligarchic model). There are also nuances characterising the ideological manoeuvres of the two formations. For example, DB focus more on the allegations that Radev is not doing enough against Peevski and is not planning a real judicial reform, while PP state that Radev is not helping the most vulnerable groups in society. This is also related to the diverging ideological affiliations at the international level. PP insist on being considered a centrist party, with their senior representatives taking part in the meeting on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the European liberals ALDE formation. DB are increasingly emphasising their right-wing profile and using the word “right” as a label for their policies.

The various internal problems should not be overlooked. PP seem to be in a complicated situation. The leadership of Asen

Vassilev in this political space, which seemed to be established during the December protests, is increasingly eroding. PP are also encountering increasingly significant difficulties in identifying with the liberal urban community. The news that PP structure in Burgas has switched to “Yes, Bulgaria”, a component of DB, is not of primary importance, but it signals the danger that traditional supporters of PP-DB, faced with a choice, will turn to their earlier preference in the form of DB. And among other things, PP are also investing too much political energy in defending the authority of their leader Vassilev as Finance Minister, which risks confirming the criticism that they are mainly concerned with themselves.

A critical moment for DB is the upcoming elections for chairman of the Democrats for a Strong Bulgaria, a constituent part of the coalition. The initially outlined competition between the current leader Atanas Atanasov and his predecessor Radan Kanev has been jeopardised by the rise of a third candidate, Yordan Ivanov, who suddenly received the informal support of former Prime Minister Ivan Kostov.

A common political field of interaction between PP and DB is undoubtedly the presidential elections in the autumn, a delicate topic that is not developing in the most convincing way so far. The media persistently speculated that the future presidential pair of PP and DB would consist of the recently acting Prime Minister Andrey Gyurov and the resigned Secretary General of the Ministry of the Interior Georgi Kandev - both of whom are highly praised for their achievements in urban liberal circles. It was not long before the feeling of political intrigue arose. Without being authorised by anyone, Atanas Atanasov almost declared support for Gyurov and Kandev. Assen Vassilev, for his part, distanced himself. Ambiguous but contradictory reactions came from other politicians of PP and DB. The impression seems to be that the presidential candidacy will be “handed down” from above, without discussions and nominations, and will have to be supported out of inevitability, so as not to provoke division. It should be recalled that the discussion about this candidacy in PP and DB has been going on for a year and a half, before it started in any other formation, and has not led to any clearer result, except for the recognition that there is no technological time for the planned preliminary elections to take place. This raises three risks. First, of compromising the entire publicly stated strategy for civil activism “from below”, which was embodied in the initiatives and meetings of the so-called Forum for Democratic Action and there is a considerable probability that it will remain without any consequences. Second, of stimulating dissatisfaction with the “fait accompli”, expressed in self-union nominations of other presidential candidates. Without being final, the candidacy of former Minister of War Nikolay Nenchev has already been put on the table. And third, of losing the monopoly on the attitudes of the urban liberal community, a danger that is evident in the two protests against Radev’s government, whose organisers explicitly rejected the participation of party figures on the podium.

The Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF). The party is the least publicly visible among the participants in parliament, but it seems to be the most fixated on the political fate of its leader. We are currently observing a kind of withdrawal from the public political process, with an absence of positions and assessments on almost all topics of the day.

Changes were made in the leadership, which resulted in the departure of key figures for MRF such as Yordan Tsonev, Hamid Hamid and Stanislav Anastasov, and Tsonev even left politics. On one hand, this is probably an assessment of an unconvincing electoral performance, but on the other, we continue to see an outflow of people from the time of Ahmed Dogan, who changed their positions in the 2024 rift. The stability of MRF cannot be taken for granted, given that breaches are already occurring in various local structures – in Stambolovo, in Kirkovo, and in Novi Pazar. The reasons for leaving are often presented as disagreements with the leadership, but one must also take into account the internal processes in this community, and especially the fact that a number of Dogan’s activists are integrating into the second echelon of Radev’s administration, while Peevski’s are gradually being pushed out.

In the spirit of his practice from the election campaign, Peevski does not comment on personal attacks against himself. His reactions at this stage are reduced to signals through close media outlets and to statements by his MP Kalin Stoyanov, and in most cases directed not against Prime Minister Radev, but against Interior Minister Demerdzhiev. It can be assumed that Peevski still harbours hope that a general agreement with Radev is possible. In the past two months since the new government took office, most of the revelations, including the stories of flights to Dubai, concern peripheral cases and relatively modest sums. If the government stops there, Peevski could certainly accept it without objection. The question, of course, is whether it will stop there.

“Vazrazhdane” (“Revival”). The party’s strategy is almost entirely dedicated to “exposing” Rumen Radev for broadcasting false political messages, when in fact he was not against the euro, was ready to cooperate with Brussels and help Ukraine, and was willing to work with the so-called oligarchy. With this line of constant attacks, “Vazrazhdane” is clearly trying to attract back its former voters who have reoriented themselves towards PB.

Another interesting ideological trend is that it resembles a long-term campaign. It is about the theme of the “dignity of small nations” against the dictates of the Great Powers, exploited by “Vazrazhdane” through a series of publicly displayed historical examples. The analogies with the possibility of Bulgaria proudly defending its independence under the leadership of the party are clear. A practical case was also made, if we can call it that, by the decision of “Vazrazhdane” to send its delegation to the funeral of the Iranian leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

4.

The progressive political and social agenda

The recommendation of the European Commission (the second such institution after the International Monetary Fund) to abolish the flat rate tax has gained significant importance for the Bulgarian political debates. The argument from Brussels is that the levels of social payments in Bulgaria cannot be sustainably maintained under the current regressive and extremely unfair tax system. The topic of tax reform is gradually moving beyond the marginality of small left-wing groups and parties and will increasingly become a national issue.

The activation of the unions in the context of the budget procedure increasingly highlights another theme – the disagreement with the development of the country, which would be carried out at the expense of the public sector and through its limitation. The organised protests of the state administration and other professional communities are a step in this direction.

Although an extra-parliamentary formation, the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) claims a key role in the progressive space of Bulgarian society. The ambition of the leader Krum Zarkov is to show that the left is not a party “with fading functions” and

that real policy for the benefit of the majority of the people can be done outside of parliament. BSP has several lines of conduct. First, an initial loyalty to the government has been demonstrated in order to encourage the right decisions and to escape the trap of self-isolated opposition. Second, a rethinking of the ideological profile is underway in the direction of searching for the authentic left. The “Blagoev Readings” organised in many cities of the country, dictated by the desire to affirm and update the ideas of the creator of modern Bulgarian social democracy, Dimitar Blagoev, are acquiring symptomatic significance. Third, a clear emphasis is placed on the unfair social model, expressed in criticism of the current tax system and in initiatives, together with the popular municipal councillor from Sofia Vanya Grigorova, to abolish mandatory participation in private pension funds. And fourth, the potential for a political comeback of the left is explored. The second place of BSP and coalition candidate Plamena Zayachka in the partial local elections in the Sredets district of the capital, albeit with low turnout, is an encouraging sign. The more serious challenge is related to the possible candidacy of Iliyana Yotova for a full presidential term and the effects on the left of a victory for her.

5.

Main conclusions, forecasts and recommendations

The inauguration of the new government in Bulgaria was accompanied by widely circulated expectations, including by influential international media, of a pro-Russian turn in Bulgaria's foreign policy. It turned out to be exaggerated. The political biography of Prime Minister Rumen Radev does not indicate and does not give sustenance for speculation about a pro-Russian bias, but rather for a more moderate policy, distanced from the hawkish attitude towards Russia. Of course, the big question in such a situation has already been formulated by the opposition - in conditions of geopolitical tension, when the EU challenges Russia's global presence, aren't political nuances becoming the basis for Bulgaria's European isolation.

It is difficult to make a definitive assessment. Radev clearly believes that the categorical and unconditional anti-Russian line is not a consensus in the EU, or even in Central and Eastern Europe, if we take Slovakia and Hungary after Orban as an example, and the European Commission, which, in the person of its President Ursula von der Leyen and the High Representative for Foreign Policy Kaia Kalas, defends it most resolutely, is not the most authoritative platform for international politics in Europe. Radev's decision to make his first foreign policy visit as Prime Minister to Berlin was significant, since according to an unwritten tradition, the first destination of all Bulgarian Prime Ministers has been Brussels. The choice between Brussels and Berlin should not be exaggerated in its significance, but to some extent it expresses Radev's understanding that Europe needs an agreement on building a joint defence capability, and not so much an agreement on Ukraine. Incidentally, this partly corresponds to the public messages of the administration of US President Donald Trump.

The more important topic for Bulgaria's European policy is how well it will be able to fit into the "coalition of the dissatisfied" of the new EU budgetary framework for the period 2028-2034, where, according to the initial plan, security spending is ex-

panded at the cost of funds for cohesion, agriculture and regional development.

Radev's government has not justified the hopes of some of its supporters for a quick wave of retribution for the crimes of recent years and for urgent large-scale reforms. The cabinet's internal policy has been "postponed", and the behaviour towards Boyko Borisov and Delyan Peevski - reserved for the future. In fact, it is in the autumn that the key political decisions for the country are expected to be concentrated, including the budget policy for 2027, judicial reform, and price regulation. This also raises the danger of simultaneous interaction of social and political problems.

Radev's government seems to have taken a course towards centralisation of power. It is unfolding in many directions, but under the common denominator of limiting certain bodies (High Judicial Council, special manager of Lukoil, etc.) in favour of the government's powers. Rather, commentators are mistaken who see in Radev's personnel policy concessions to other parties, due to the biographical affiliation of one or another politician to a party in the past. These are not "hidden" coalitions, but "open" shifts of loyalties in the context of the widespread belief in the upcoming long-term rule of PB.

The Presidential elections are traditionally a test for any government. An inconclusive result for their candidate would suggest a crisis of confidence. On the other hand, there is also a test for the opposition parties, because their candidate who would qualify for the second round would have every chance of being a candidate for leader of the entire opposition – something that many are worried about. PB seem to have no choice but to support the incumbent President Iliana Yotova for a new term. Any other decision would be inexplicable and potentially disastrous. The question is whether the support will be clear and unconditional, or reserved and formal.

About the author

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About this study

FES Bulgaria has been publishing the „Polit-Barometer“ since 2000, analyzing current and long-term political processes and identifying trends in Bulgarian politics with a special focus on the political parties as democratic actors. In a situation where the quality and neutrality of Bulgarian media is under question, we aim to provide a scientific basis for a political discussion for Bulgarian and international readers.

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Polit-Barometer



The great election victory did not produce political comfort for the government of Progressive Bulgaria.



The government is stabilising its power without rapid reforms.



The political agenda is increasingly dominated by the upcoming presidential elections.

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