

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ACTIVITIES OF MODERN POLITICAL PARTIES AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PARTY SYSTEM IN THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA

The author proves that the first post-Communist party system of the Republic of Bulgaria underwent significant changes after the parliamentary elections of 2001. The right bloc was stratified; the transformation of the Bulgarian socialist party was completed, which led to the transition to a new party system. The second post-Communist party system, which was born as a multi-party system, has also undergone dynamic changes after the parliamentary elections in 2005 and 2009. Its evolution depends on new cleavages (that appeared and will appear), what will happen in the inner party relations, how it will affect the change in electoral preferences and party identification. The evolution of the party system is a long process, which is influenced by the new social structure of the society, its values, changes in the political culture of citizens and political class, as well as “political construction” due to changes in the electoral legislation and the electoral system in Bulgaria.

Keywords: Republic of Bulgaria, political parties, party system, cleavages, the stability of governments, the opposition, party relationships.

СПЕЦИФІКА ДІЯЛЬНОСТІ СУЧАСНИХ ПОЛІТИЧНИХ ПАРТІЙ ТА РОЗВИТКУ ПАРТІЙНОЇ СИСТЕМИ В РЕСПУБЛІЦІ БОЛГАРІЯ

Автор доводить, що перша посткомуністична партійна система Республіки Болгарія зазнала суттєвих змін після парламентських виборів 2001 р. Відбулося розшарування правого блоку, завершилася трансформація Болгарської соціалістичної партії, що і зумовило перехід до нової партійної системи. Друга посткомуністична партійна система, яка зародилася як багатопартійна, вже також зазнала динамічних змін після виборів до парламенту у 2005 та 2009 рр. Її еволюція залежить від того, які нові клівіджі (з'явилися і ще з'являться), як будуть складатися внутрішні партійні взаємини, як це позначиться на зміні електоральних уподобань і партійній ідентифікації. Еволюція партійної системи – тривалий процес, на який впливають нова соціальна структура суспільства, його ціннісні установки, зміни в політичній культурі громадян і політичного класу, а також «політичне конструювання» через зміни у виборчому законодавстві і виборчій системі Болгарії.

Ключові слова: Республіка Болгарія, політичні партії, партійна система, клівіджі, стабільність урядів, опозиція, партійні взаємини.

During the years of transformation, since 1989, a real multi-party system has emerged in the Republic of Bulgaria. Since the early 90s this small Balkan country had more than 200 political parties (in the twenty-first century - 250). In outlining the objectives of their activities, it is necessary to take into account the special circumstances and prerequisites that had a great influence on the transformation processes and ideological pluralism in the Republic of Bulgaria. When studying the organizational and functional problems of multi-party system and the formation of the party system in the Republic of Bulgaria, certain correlations between the state and prospects of the system and the type of political relations that dominate the political system of society are needed.

Analyzing this phenomenon, the author relied on the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria¹, which defined the general legal basis of the electoral process, the Act "On elections of people's representatives"², which pointed to the conditions and procedure for the election of people's deputies, and the Act "On political parties"³ (the order of their formation, legal status, goals and objectives, principles of internal organization, mechanisms and procedures for participation in elections).

The phases of dismantling the party's monopoly on authority. The long reign of the Bulgarian Communist party (BCP operated in 1948-1989) ended with the removal of its leader T. Zhivkov from the authority on November 10, 1989. In Bulgaria, we can pinpoint three stages of dismantling the party monopoly on power. At the first stage (November 10, 1989 – January 13, 1990) a liberalization of the regime took place. At the same time, there were attempts to maintain the position of the BCP, despite the fact that the first political parties and organizations were beginning to be created, which denied the monopoly of the BCP and fought for the democratization of the political system in the country.

The second stage (18 January – 10 June 1990) was the formal democratization of the political system. At this time, representatives of various political forces worked on the creation of a new Constitution, from which the provision on the leadership role of the Communist party was removed, and new articles regulating the activities of political parties were introduced. The main merit of the democratization of the political system belongs to the activities of the "Round table" (January 3 – may 15, 1990), which was attended by two parties – the BCP and the Union of democratic forces (SDS – newly created anti-Communist coalition of 17 parties and public organizations). Most of the decisions that were taken at the Round table had a decisive influence on the creation of new laws and the formation of a new Constitution, on the activities of political parties in Bulgaria, on the deprivation of the political monopoly and control of the BCP. The agreements reached during the round table (the Act "On elections to the Great National Assembly", the Act "On political parties", etc.) subsequently made it possible

¹ Конституция на Република България. Приета от Великото народно събрание 12 юли 1991 г. София: Нова звезда, 2002. 40 с.

² Закон за избори. София: Нова звезда, 2001. 47 с.

³ Закон за политическите партии. Държавен вестник. 1990. 13 април.

to form the legal basis for a new democratic political system in Bulgaria, the core of which was political pluralism⁴.

In the third stage (June 1990 – July 12, 1991), the Bulgarians overcame all formal and factual grounds for the existence of a party monopoly in the country. Elections to the Great National Assembly were held (June 1990), which had to adopt a new Constitution of Bulgaria. Of the 40 parties that participated in the elections, the Bulgarian socialist party (BSP), the former BCP, won the majority of seats (54%) in a coalition with its partners. The SDS became the second political force with 36% of the votes. Bulgarian agrarian people's Union, a partner of the Bulgarian Communist party from the time of socialism, came in third place. It was followed by a new political party representing the interests of the ethnic minority of the Turks in Bulgaria – the Movement for rights and freedoms. Therefore, the process of forming a multi-party system took place in the conditions of maintaining strong positions and great influence of the BCP; the transformation of the BCP – BSP into a democratic party for a long time had a significant impact on the formation of a multi-party system in the country. “The processes that took place in the BCP – BSP, especially at the initial stage – the Bulgarian political scientist G. Karasimeonov wrote – led to the evolution of party pluralism, including the opposition”⁵.

The peaceful transition from one political system to another let to avoid a civil war in Bulgaria, but it also led to the long-term influence of the BCP – BSP on the multi-party system and the political process. Compared to other CEE countries, the slow changes in the Republic of Bulgaria have resulted in a long-term “asynchronous pluralism in favour of the BCP – BSP”⁶.

The leader of the opposition Z. Zhelev won the presidential election in August 1990 (SDS), who actively contributed to the creation of a new regulatory framework of public administration in Bulgaria⁷. Many positions in the Executive branch were occupied by representatives of the opposition, which influenced management decisions in the country and gradually stopped the monopoly of the BCP – BSP in the institutions of the Executive branch.

Development of political pluralism in the Republic of Bulgaria. The adoption of the new Constitution on July 12, 1991, meant the official recognition of the principle of political pluralism, the ban on the monopoly of one party to hold all positions in state institutions, the ban on the existence of parties which purpose was the forcible seizure of state government.

In January 1992, during the presidential elections, the fight was again between the two main political parties in Bulgaria – the BSP and the SDS, however, Zhelev was elected to be the President for the second time. The first free democratic elections in the Republic of Bulgaria, according to the new Bulgarian Constitution, were held on October 13, 1991, together with

⁴ Кръглата маса: Стенографическ и протоколи 3 януари – 15 май 1990, София. София: Фондация Д-р Желя Желев, 1990. 716 с.

⁵ Карасимеонов Г. Новата партийна система в България. София, 2003. С. 47.

⁶ Ibid. P. 48.

⁷ Голяев А. Президент Желя Желев: «България после 1989 г. взела ориентир на Запад». Вести Европы. 1995, 9 декември.

local elections of public councilors and kmets. They were exceptional, because they had to solve the question of power and the balance of political forces in the center and on the ground. The election campaign took place in the context of a sharp struggle between the BSP and the SDS, and led to a “historical change in the balance of power”⁸. SDS won with a minimum advantage, receiving 34.36% of the votes and 110 seats (out of 240 seats), BSP received 33.14% of the votes and 106 seats. The third political force – the RPS – received 7.55% and 24 mandates. The election results showed that the parties focused on the “center” of the party system did not have serious support of the electorate. At the same time, the elections revealed special features of the post-Communist party system – an acute confrontational struggle between the BSP and the SDS, which had almost equal support of voters; their territorial advantages: the voters of the SDS are mainly residents of big cities, and the supporters of the BSP are residents of small towns and villages⁹.

When the process of formation of a new party system began in 1989, the Republic of Bulgaria was “an alternating, exclusively economic, political and spiritual environment, transforming radically”¹⁰. Conditions of formation of parties of the Republic of Bulgaria differed from the conditions in the countries of the developed democracy. In Bulgaria, the link to the political tradition that existed until 1934, when the beginnings of party pluralism appeared in the country, was severed. After 1947, all the foundations of democracy and civil liberties were destroyed in the People’s Republic of Bulgaria. The economic monopoly of the state has created a social structure specific to socialism. Ideological monopoly deformed public consciousness and the possibility of establishing democratic values. Therefore, the party system, which was formed after 1989, was a product of society, despite the fact that it became an active factor that influenced the course and direction of transformation.

Social cleavages of the transformation period. Exploring the period of transformation in the Republic of Bulgaria, we should note certain public cleavages (stratifications), with the conflict potential and impact on the form and the essence of the new party system. According to the well-known methodological approach of S. Lipset and S. Rokkan in which scientists have deduced a typology of cleavages¹¹, it is obvious that for the countries of transitional period, which were in a situation similar to the Bulgarian after 1989, the emergence of historical cleavages was typical. They determined the configuration of the party of the socialist period, which had an especially sharp class cleavage (workers – capitalists); in addition, religious cleavages had also been sharp (Orthodox, Catholics, Muslims, etc.), national-ethnic cleavages, the opposition of center and periphery (urban – rural) and the like.

⁸ Карасимеонов Г. Новата партийна система в България. София, 2003. С. 70.

⁹ Ibid. P. 71.

¹⁰ Карасимеонов Г. Партийная система в Болгарии в 2001-2009 гг.: трансформация и эволюция политических партий. Вестник Московского университета. Серия 12. Политические науки. 2011. № 1. С. 24.

¹¹ Lipset S. et al. *A Comparative Analysis of the Social Requisites of Democracy*. International Social Science Journal. 1993. Vol. 45. № 136. P. 155-176.

In some post-Communist countries, “authentic” parties with their historical party tradition have emerged. In the Bulgarian historical parties these traditions were weak, almost destroyed during the years of socialism. Recovery of such parties as the BSDRP, the BZNS, the Democratic party and the like in the 90’s did not significantly affect the new political reality, and the old identity merged with their new image – the founders of the SDS. An attempt by the parties to participate independently in the elections, outside the SDS, showed that the Bulgarian electorate supports them minimally, and they moved to margins¹². The only historical party that retained political influence, but radically changed its essence is the BCP, which occupied the social democratic space.

The new party system of the Republic of Bulgaria was almost unaffected by the religious and ethnic cleavages. But decisive was the influence of a new type of cleavage, which is manifested in the transition period – ideological, value. Ideological and value differences (communism – anti-communism) formed the basis of the line of division along which there were party divisions and which led to the confrontation of political parties. This cleavage had absorbed the contradictions of the two political blocs (the BSP and SDS) for the assessment of the former regime and the future of communist leaders, current pace and nature of changes, the nature of the constitutional structure of the country, the way of the government reconstruction (revolutionary and evolutionary), geopolitical orientation. The duration of the cleavage and its manifestations in the acute form led to the hegemony of the BSP and the slow processes of transformation in the Communist party in the first years of changes, which, in turn, increased the radicalization of its main opponent – the SDS¹³.

Ethnic cleavage led to the emergence of the party Movement for Rights and Freedoms. Ethnic problems have worsened in Bulgaria in the 80’s because of the BCP’s assimilation policy towards the Turkish minority. First, the reason for the emergence of an ethnic party was the protection of the rights of the Turks in Bulgaria, the restoration of their civil and political freedoms. The SDS supported the RPS as an ally in the anti-Communist struggle. However, this ethnic cleavage did not become a source of ethnic confrontation due to the flexible policy of the BSP¹⁴. The RPS was integrated into the party system with the status of a third party, small, but able to balance between two large blocks, to influence the management of the country, supporting one of the leading forces. The electoral system with a 4% barrier, which limited the possibility of small parties, contributed to the strengthening of this party configuration¹⁵.

By the end of the century these two cleavages have been exhausted. The main reforms carried out in the country clearly indicated the irreversibility of the transition of the Republic to

¹² Карасимеонов Г. Партийная система в Болгарии в 2001-2009 гг.: трансформация и эволюция политических партий. Вестник Московского университета. Серия 12. Политические науки. 2011. № 1. С. 25.

¹³ Генев Н. Рискове на прехода. София: Национално и регионално развитие, 1994. С. 23.

¹⁴ Четвърта Национална конференция на Движението за права и свободи. София, 2000. С. 11-12.

¹⁵ Герджиков С. Хаос и ред след комунизма. София: Екстрем, 1998. С. 127.

a political system of democracy, market economy, foreign policy orientation to the European Union and NATO. By the end of the century, society had reached a certain consensus on the basic values of the new economic and political systems. The relations between the leading Bulgarian parties – SDS, BSP and DPS – have become more civilized. However, the bipolar model of the party system that was formed – proved to be very unstable. The presence of a third political force – the RPS, contributed to the frequent change in the balance of power between the main parties and influenced the formation of the Executive power in the Republic of Bulgaria. Although the confrontation of the main political actors of the Republic of Bulgaria, which has continued since the beginning of the transformation throughout the post-Communist years, has somewhat reduced the tension, but its negative impact on the activities of the Bulgarian political parties and those in opposition and in power is noticeable¹⁶.

The specifics of the process of formation of Bulgarian power institutions at the beginning of the new century and their impact on the development of the party system. Parties, the electoral and party systems, by transferring various forms of pluralism in civil society to the sphere of power relations, constitute a single mechanism for obtaining power. Modern democracy is impossible without them. The main parties in their interaction, struggle and rotation in power are considered as a single party system, which determines the effectiveness of the entire political system.

The June 2001 parliamentary elections for the first time completed a full four-year cadence of the National Assembly (Parliament of the Republic of Bulgaria). Contrary to the expectations of the fight of the main political actors in the elections – BSP, SDS and their coalitions, a new political force – the National Movement Simeon II (NRSD) – entered the arena and won the elections. His appearance had a number of reasons. First, it is the existing vacuum due to the decline in the legitimacy of the main political parties in the party space – the BSP and the SDS. After all, almost 50% of voters did not intend to vote for the main parties in 2001. Secondly, the consequences of reforms after the crisis of 1996-1997 caused acute social and material problems among citizens, disappointment and discontent with the policy of the ruling SDS, which contributed to the victory of the new NRSD. Third, a specific factor – the appearance of the personality of Simeon the Second (Simeon Saksoburgotski – former tsar of Bulgaria), his popularity and charisma contributed to the rapid approval of NRSD in the Republic of Bulgaria. He represented a new type of leader, free from the burden of party politics of the post-revolutionary years, and focused good expectations in the social life of the Bulgarians; he carried a new political culture, cleansed from the confrontation of the past. These are the main specific factors that created in the policy of the Republic of Bulgaria preconditions for a unique “wedging” of the NRSD into the party space only two months before the elections¹⁷.

¹⁶ Карасимеонов Г. Новата партийна система в България. София, 2003. С. 55.

¹⁷ Карасимеонов Г. Новата партийна система в България. София, 2003. С. 99.

Despite the fact that in the program declarations of the three main political formations (NRSD, Coalition Association of democratic forces (SDS), the Coalition for Bulgaria (BSP) there were no significant differences in the priority areas of development of the state, the results were determined primarily by the expectation of changes related to NRDS. The elections caused a sharp change in the balance of party forces and in the configuration of parliamentary groups in the 39th National Assembly. But the main consequence was the break of the current bipolar model of the party system, which was based on the dominance and continuity in the power of the SDS and BSP. They received less than 20% of the vote, and became medium-sized electoral parties, with relatively equal public support. Therefore, the transitional party system, which emerged in Bulgaria in 1989, exhausted itself after the 2001 elections.

In subsequent years, a new party system was formed, which is typical for consolidated democracies, in which there is a new configuration of party formations and a new type of relationship between them. The establishment of a certain party system as a subsystem of a democratic political system reflects the processes of stratification of this society, leading to the formation of conscious political interests and behavior, political orientation and identification with the relevant party. The formation of a certain type of party system is a consequence of the purposeful normative activity of the political elite, its influence on the political process and party activities. An example of such activities are the laws on political parties and elections, the adoption of a certain type of electoral system. The behavior and culture of the new political elite are of particular importance in times of social change. These factors are crucial in the formation and development of the party system, operated in the early XXI century in the Republic of Bulgaria and facilitated the transition to a new (second) party system.

NRSD is the largest political force by the electoral influence, unconventionally and quickly pushed aside other leading parties of the Republic of Bulgaria. Members of the NRSD formed a parliamentary group, which had an almost absolute majority. Not having any party history, NRSD was being built, created an organization, ideology, team leaders and management policies. The main structure of the NRSD – a parliamentary group, became the core of the party within the movement. Therefore, the elections of 2001 created a fundamentally new political situation, which had an important impact on the party system. It changed the party configuration from 2+2 (two big – BSP and SDS, and two smaller parties – RPS and Eurolivitsia) to 1+2+1 formula (one dominant formation – NRSD, plus two medium sized parties – BSP and SDS, plus one smaller party –RPS).

Despite the fact that during the administration of the NKSD, National Assembly's deputies expressed their vote of no confidence six times in a row, the opposition could not win. Even when in February 2005 some of the deputies moved to the opposition from the majority and, expressing a vote of no confidence, they achieved the resignation of the head of Parliament, the situation has not changed. Prime Minister S. Saksoburgotski used his own leverage and some of the deputies, changing their opinion, voted for confidence in the government. He was able

to fully use the management mandate and come to new elections with some success – Bulgaria became a member of NATO and was able to gain recognition among the EU member States, which decided on the date of its adoption in its organization – January 1, 2007.

NRSD managed to keep the majority of supporters among the voters and to come in second among 22 parties which took part in the 2005 elections. It testifies that, despite all difficulties and forecasts of the first years of board, NRSD gained recognition and kept a certain rating in society, proved the ability to operate the state. All previous elections in the Republic of Bulgaria showed that the authority of the ruling party during the years of rule fell sharply and in the new elections citizens voted for another party, depriving the current government of the mandate. But NRSD received only half as many votes as in 2001.

In the 2005 elections, the socialists won. They created a coalition government and elected the BSP leader S. Stanishev as Prime Minister. A year remained before the presidential elections and the current President G. Pырванов was also a socialist, so during the year Bulgaria was ruled by the BSP –left wing party, which made certain changes in the internal and foreign policy of the state. With this government, the Republic of Bulgaria became a member of the European Union. For the admission the government of the Republic took urgent measures to complete the reforms, so that the so-called “safety clause” didn’t come into action and Bulgaria’s membership would not be postponed for another year.

Negative impact on the rating of the government had the changes caused by the global financial crisis in 2008, the Government was unable to solve most of the societal problems, so in the parliamentary elections in 2009 only half of the citizens voted for the ruling socialists. The Bulgarians at the rallies criticized the government’s activities towards fighting the crisis and corruption, for which the country could not claim assistance from the European Union. Therefore, it is not surprising that the victory in the elections was won by the new opposition party “Citizens for European development of Bulgaria” (GERB), which voters gave almost 40% of the votes. “Coalition for Bulgaria” (BSP) was supported by 17.72% of citizens, RPS – 14.47%, the party “Attack” – 9.37%, “Blue coalition” (SDS) – 6.73%, the party “Order, law and justice” – 4.13%. Other parties failed to overcome the 4% barrier and failed to enter Parliament¹⁸. Following the elections of 2009, a center-right government was formed in Bulgaria. BSP went into opposition.

The leader of the opposition, the Chairman of the party GERB – Boyko Borisov became the new Prime Minister. The former guard, and later the mayor of Sofia won the favor of the Bulgarians through the image of a man of business and politics that worries about ordinary citizens¹⁹. This image of the leader of the government allowed the GERB to win again the elections to the National Assembly in 2013. But this party did not secure an absolute majority of

¹⁸ Партия ГЕРБ («Граждане за европейское развитие Болгарии») победила на выборах в парламент Болгарии. URL: <http://www.prime-tass.ru/news/0/%7B8BA6767E-78C7-42DF-946D-469F3733D585%7D.uif> [odczyt: 12.03.2019].

¹⁹ На парламентських виборах у Болгарії впевнено перемогла опозиція. URL: <http://www.nrcu.gov.ua/index.php?id=48&clid=94355> [odczyt: 12.03.2019].

votes and could not create a government coalition. Therefore, on May 23 Borisov returned to the President of the Republic of Bulgaria the right to form a government, which he forwarded to the BSP, which won the second place in the elections. On May 29 the National Assembly elected P. Oresharski as a Prime Minister. However, from the first day of his work protests arose against the new government, the demonstrators demanded the resignation of the Cabinet. During 2013-2014, the opposition initiated five unsuccessful votings regarding the vote of no confidence in the government (October 2 and 17, 2013, February 12, May 30, 13 June, 2014). In the end, the Chairman of the BSP S. Stanishev stated the need for elections to legitimize the government²⁰.

Early elections to the Bulgarian Parliament in 2014 and their consequences. On July 27, the leaders of the four parties – GERB, BSP, DPS and non-parliamentary “Bulgaria without censorship” – agreed on the appointment of early elections to the National Assembly on October 5, 2014 and the President agreed with this date²¹. 7 coalitions and 18 parties took part in the elections. More than 17 thousand observers watched the voting²². The votes were distributed among the parties as follows: GERB received – 32.67%, BSP – Left Bulgaria – 15.40%, RPS – 14.84%, Reformist bloc – 8.89%, the national front for the salvation of Bulgaria (in the coalition “Patriotic front”) – 7.28%, Bulgaria without censorship – 5.69%, “Attack” – 4.52%, the Alternative for the Bulgarian revival – 4.15%²³. For the second time Borisov became the Prime Minister of Bulgaria – the first time was in 2009-2013 and since November 7, 2014. Therefore the coalition government of the right political forces acted in the country.

However, in November 2016, regular presidential elections were held in the Republic of Bulgaria. The political parties hoped that the elections would give them the expected opportunity to adjust the balance of power that had developed at that time in Parliament. However, it was questionable whether such changes were possible or not. After all, since 2014, power in Bulgaria has been concentrated in the hands of the party GERB, as B. Borisov had been the Prime Minister at that time, and the President of the state was his nominee – Rosen Plevneliev. For a long time the GERB ruled the state in a coalition with the former right forces of the Union of democratic forces (it was headed by former Prime Minister Ivan Kostov). Sometimes they were supported situationally by the radical party “Attack” with its leader Vilen Siderov. Other parties represented the opposition, led by the Bulgarian socialist party with leader Sergei Stanishev, in a coalition with the ethnic Turkish party DPS and NSD. GERB party, first won

²⁰ *BSP Leader Stanishev Demands Government Resignation, July Elections*. URL: <http://www.novinite.com/articles/161192/BSP+Leader+Stanishev+Demands+Government+Resignation%2C+July+Elections> [odczyt: 09.03.2019].

²¹ Президент Болгарии подтвердил дату внеочередных выборов. URL: <http://rus.bg/obschestvo/89-obschestvo/9316-prezident-bolgarii-podverdil-datu-vneochednyh-vyborov-5-okt> [odczyt: 03.03.2019].

²² В Болгарии начались досрочные парламентские выборы. URL: <http://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/1486969> [odczyt: 03.03.2019].

²³ Резултати от избори за народни представители 05.10.2014 г. за страната. URL: <http://results.cik.bg/pi2014/rezultati/> [odczyt: 09.03.2019].

election in 2009 and until 2016, it consistently won in all election races²⁴. The only serious rival of party GERB could be considered a spontaneous expression of discontent of citizens who took to protest actions on the streets of many cities of the state. However, the leaders of the party GERB managed to build such tactics and strategy that none of the existing parties in Bulgaria could seriously claim the role of the opposition.

In the National Assembly in 2014, seven parties acted together with GERB. The Bulgarian press wrote that each political movement was represented by two parliamentary forces²⁵. In addition to GERB, the right-liberal spectrum was represented by the Reformist bloc (RB). From the parties of the nationalist spectrum “Attack” and its competitor – the Patriotic front entered the Parliament. The forces of the left were represented by the BSP and the party of Georgi Pyrvanov “Alternative for Bulgarian Renaissance” (ABV), which has moved away from the socialists. This list of parliamentary political forces was completed by the RPS ethnic party, which at the end of 2015 divided into two, and thus two Turkish parties – the RPS and the “Democrats for responsibility, freedom and tolerance” (DVST) fought for seats in the National Assembly in 2017.

So, each parliamentary party had its competitor who applied for the same electorate (except for, perhaps, the ruling party GERB, voters of which vote rather for the person of its leader Boyko Borisov, than for the program or ideology). According to G. Pyrvanov, the main opposition force, which traditionally challenged the championship of the GERB – BSP, was in opposition not to the government, but rather to its main competitor from the left flank – ABV. Potential rival of the GERB in the fight for the right wing voters, the Reformist bloc, fit into the role of his younger partner, and dutifully accepted the resignation of its Ministers, which B. Borisov prudently appointed to the most problematic ministries²⁶. Other parties (ethnic Turkish RPS and nationalist Patriotic front and “Attack”) were engaged in inter-party struggle, and therefore not so much criticized GERB but rather sought its support.

In the end, an effective enough party system was created where the leader of GERB B. Borisov kept all potential competitors under control. Almost every decision of the ruling party could create a majority in Parliament, playing on the contradictions of their younger partners. Weakened opponents were not even trying to dispute its rights, they were happy with their own place in the system, which was created by B. Borisov. Most analysts at the beginning of 2016 believed that the system of political relations built by the Prime Minister would allow his party to lead its presidential candidate without any difficulties, while maintaining a dominant position. However, subsequent events refuted these forecasts.

²⁴ *Граждани за европейско развитие на България* (ГЕРБ). URL: http://www.gerb.bg/bg/news/spisyk-stanovishta_i_pozicii-3.html [odczyt: 09.03.2019].

²⁵ Симеонов П. ГЕРБ и Обединените патриоти по-скоро имат условия в 44-ото Народно събрание да изпълнят заявените политики. 2017. 18 априля. URL: <http://www.focus-news.net/opinion/2017/04/18/42635/parvan-simeonov-politolog-gerb-i-obedinenite-patrioti-po-skoro-imat-usloviya-v-44-oto-narodno-sabranie-da-izpalnyat-za-yavenite-politiki.html> [odczyt: 10.03.2019].

²⁶ Георгиев В. Заявка за програмиран провал. 2014. 5 ноември. URL: <http://pogled.info/avtorski/Valentin-Georgiev/zayavka-za-programiran-poval.59572> [odczyt: 10.03.2019].

It is known that Bulgaria is a parliamentary Republic in which the powers of the head of state are quite limited, but despite this, the President of the Republic of Bulgaria is elected in nationwide elections. The main contenders for the 2016 presidential election were Tsetska Tsacheva, who represented GERB²⁷, and the candidate from the BSP – Rumen Radev²⁸. At the time of the elections Tsacheva was the speaker of the National Assembly of Bulgaria (this is the first woman speaker in the history of Bulgaria)²⁹. G. Radev – a professional military pilot, who once headed the air force of the state.

Additional significance and intrigue of these elections was added by the fact that the current Prime Minister of Bulgaria and leader of the GERB party B. Borisov stated before the elections that in case of defeat of T. Tsacheva the Parliament will be dissolved. In fact, he decided to turn the election into a referendum to evaluate his policies, linking the results to the future of the current government and the National Assembly.

Such political statements and dispositions are not a new phenomenon in modern politics. Quite often, politicians tie the future of the government according to the results of citizens' voting in elections or referendums, trying to ensure the desired result for themselves. However, such combination of future destiny of the politician and the results of the voting – is a double-edged weapon. It is difficult to predict whether voters will support a functioning government or not. But the defeat of the current government will inevitably entail resignation. In this regard, it is advisable to recall two very recent examples from the development of the electoral process and its results in the UK and Italy.

In the UK, on the eve of the referendum on the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union, Prime Minister James Cameron said that if the majority of voters vote for the withdrawal of the state from the EU, he will resign³⁰. As you know, the majority of voters voted for Brexit, which forced D. Cameron to keep his own promises and thus end his political career. At the end of 2016 the same move was made by Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi, who said he would resign if the majority of voters voted in a referendum against his proposed radical reform of the Constitution³¹. The voters did not support the changes proposed by the Prime Minister and the political career of Signor M. Renzi was also sadly interrupted.

In Bulgaria B. Borisov went on the same slippery slope, linking the fate of his government with the results of the presidential elections, which in this case proved to be as disappointing as with his Western European colleagues. Already in the first round, which took place on

²⁷ Антонова Д. Цецка Цачева, вече официално, кандидатът на ГЕРБ за президент. *News.bg*, 2 октомври, 2016.

²⁸ БСП отрязва АБВ от преговорите за обща коалиция за президентските избори. От столетницата не са съгласни с предложението от партията на Първанов проект за коалиционно споразумение. *Blitz.bg*, 23 август, 2016.

²⁹ Борисов обяви официално Цецка Цачева за кандидат-президент на ГЕРБ: Нацията има нужда и от майка (допълнена). *Дневник.bg*, 2016, 2 октомври.

³⁰ Почему британский премьер ушел в отставку? URL: <https://inosmi.ru/politic/20160627/236990095.html>; Дэвид Кэмерон освобождает для Терезы Мэй пост и квартиру. URL: <https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-36781539> [odczyt: 05.04.2017].

³¹ Итальянцы отклонили конституционную реформу, премьер-министр Маттео Ренци уходит. URL: <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/3840538> [odczyt: 05.04.2017].

November 6, 2016, the protege of Prime Minister Tsacheva took only second place, gaining 3% less votes than R. Radev. Before the second round of elections, all government forces and administrative resources were thrown to ensure the victory of Tsacheva, to which the Bulgarian society has a rather ambiguous attitude. Indeed, during the electoral campaign “not so charismatic T. Tsacheva could not get out of the shadow of B. Borisov, because of what she gave an impression of a weak candidate who is devoid of independence”³².

During the election campaign, R. Radev was credited with “special ties with the Kremlin”, as the BSP is considered a pro-Russian party. However, R. Radev answered these accusations by the fact that not only is he not a member of the BSP, but moreover, he is the first Bulgarian military man who received military education in the United States. The moment of truth came on November 13, when in the second round R. Radev won a convincing victory, receiving 59.37% of the vote and became the President of Bulgaria³³. The next day, November 14, B. Borisov, following this word, resigned³⁴. Two days later, the National Assembly accepted his resignation with 218 votes “for” and 0 “against”³⁵. Therefore, Bulgaria had an urgent need for early parliamentary elections.

Reasons for the resignation of the Prime Minister and the announcement of new early elections to the National Assembly. These topics were very actively discussed in the Bulgarian press and look obvious. The ruling party overestimated its resources, putting forward a presidential candidate personality, devoid of its own charisma, but loyal and manageable. It caused irritation in society: voters, it seems, already didn’t ask, but the President was appointed, as an ordinary official. The opposition quickly took into account these protest public sentiments and proposed a candidate who was the complete opposite of the candidate from GERB – R. Radev – general officer, pilot-ACE, non-party, and therefore not responsible for the problems faced by the state in recent years, respectable, well-educated and intelligent³⁶. In the end, R. Radev was supported by representatives of almost all political parties, while the candidate from GERB failed to mobilize even the electorate of their own party.

If with the defeat of GERB everything looked quite transparent and it could be explained, then much deeper changes that occurred during the presidential elections – changes in political rhetoric – are undoubtedly more difficult to track. On the eve of the elections, the only unconditional and universally recognized reference point of Bulgarian policy was “Euro-Atlantic values”, which meant a wide range of concepts, both geopolitical and purely domestic. During the election campaign, there was a transition to a new paradigm in which the reference point was recognized as “national interests”.

³² Час на полити мѝни в Болгарѝи. URL: [http://www.global-analytik.com/%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B0%](http://www.global-analytik.com/%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B0%[odczyt: 10.03.2019])[odczyt: 10.03.2019].

³³ Резултати от избори за президент и вицепрезидент на републиката 2016 (III тур). Централната избирателна комисия на Република България. URL: [https://www.cik.bg/\[odczyt: 10.03.2017\]](https://www.cik.bg/[odczyt: 10.03.2017]).

³⁴ *Bulgarian PM Borisov tenders his government resignation*. Reuters. 14 November 2016.

³⁵ *Bulgarian MPs Accept PM Borisov’s Resignation*. Novinite.com. Sofia News Agency (16 November 2016).

³⁶ Болгария: выборы, до которых не дотянулась вездесущая «рука Москвы». URL: [http://izbircom.com/2017/04/23/%D0%B1%](http://izbircom.com/2017/04/23/%D0%B1%[odczyt: 12.11.2017])[odczyt: 12.11.2017].

Just before the elections, the Wall Street Journal published a document intercepted by the special services of the Republic, which contained a 30 pages of detailed strategy developed by political strategists of the Russian Federation, which may have helped R. Radev win the presidential election. Whether the publication of this document influenced the distribution of the electorate's sympathies is difficult to determine. But in the early parliamentary elections of March 26, 2017, the center-right members of GERB significantly bypassed the Moscow sympathizers of the socialists, receiving 32.65% of the vote, against 27.2%, which received the BSP. Although the entire election campaign opponents went toe to toe³⁹. Therefore, this trend, which arose in the presidential elections, was further developed in the early parliamentary elections of 2017.

Bulgarian journalists noted the unprecedented intensity of the patriotic rhetoric in these elections⁴⁰. The political parties changed their names to include the word "Bulgaria" or "Bulgarian"; came up with new slogans that sounded patriotic; accused each other of not paying enough attention to national interests and of "low-worshipping" the representatives of the European Union and NATO.

Following the parliamentary elections to the National Assembly in 2017, deputies from five political parties were elected. Bulgarian analysts note that the new Parliament is a simplified version of the previous one: each political direction is now represented by only one party, that is, the reserve parties have disappeared from the Parliament⁴¹. BSP after the victory of R. Radev has gained great popularity and became a worthy rival of the ruling party (GERB). The second left party of ABV this time could not overcome the 4% barrier and did not pass to Parliament. A similar situation has developed in the parties-duplicates from the legal sector (the Reform bloc broke up into small movements, which also could not overcome the electoral barrier) and among the representatives of the ethnic Turkish minority. Analyzing the activities of these two parties of the Turkish minority, it should be noted that during the election campaign, a scandal broke out regarding Turkey's participation in it. By that time, the Turkish authorities, preparing for a national referendum on constitutional reform, had already quarreled with Germany, Netherlands and Austria. On the verge of a quarrel were relations with Belgium, Switzerland, Denmark and Sweden. Subsequently, neighboring Bulgaria was added to this list. But if problems with West-Europeans arose through the prohibition of Ministers of the Turkish government to officially to agitate ethnic Turks to vote for the extension of the powers of Recep Erdogan, the official Sofia was outraged by the direct intervention of Ankara in the election process in relation to announced on the 26 March parliamentary elections on the side of one of the political parties.

³⁹ Вибори в Болгарії: тиха поразка симпатиків Кремля. URL: <https://politeka.net/ua/reading/analytics/420336-vybory-v-bolgarii-tihoe-porazhenie-simpatikov-kremlya/> [odczyt: 12.04.2018].

⁴⁰ Бойчева М. Конкуренция по родолюбие в именована на партиите. 21 февруля, 2017. URL: <https://trud.bg/> [odczyt: 12.04.2018].

⁴¹ Симеонов П. ГЕРБ и Обединените патриоти по-скоро имат условия в 44-ото Народно събрание да изпълнят заявените политики. 2017. 18 априля. URL: <http://www.focus-news.net/opinion/2017/04/18/42635/parvan-simeonov-politolog-gerb-i-obedinenite-patrioti-po-skoro-imat-usloviya-v-44-oto-narodno-sabranie-da-izpalnyat-za-yavenite-politiki.html> [odczyt: 11.04.2018].

The Bulgarian government accused Turkey of interfering in the elections by campaigning for the DVST party created shortly before the elections. Thus, the Turkish Ambassador to Bulgaria Suleiman Gokce starred in the propaganda video “DVST”, although Bulgarian legislation does not allow the participation of representatives of foreign States in the electoral process. Therefore, the CEC banned the screening of videos, and the court confirmed the legality of this decision. The next step in the campaign was made by the Turkish Minister of social Affairs and labor Mehmet Muezzinoglu, who met with a delegation of the Bulgarian Turks Diaspora, urged them in the upcoming elections to vote for the DVST and advised them to agitate their relatives and friends in Bulgaria to do the same. The conflict also occurred due to the insufficient number, according to Turkey, of the polling stations intended for Bulgarian citizens who were in Turkey. Ankara with a great dissatisfaction took the fact that Bulgaria intends to open only 35 polling stations in Turkey in these elections, whereas in the previous parliamentary elections they were more than 180. The Bulgarian side, justifying its decision, said that this time there were three times fewer applications for participation in the elections than in 2014. In addition, it referred to the recommendations of the European Union for the member States regarding voting abroad.

As a result of the conflict the Ambassador of Bulgaria was withdrawn from Turkey, the conditions of stay of Turkish citizens on the territory of Bulgaria became stricter, and there was also a number of Turkish citizens sent out of the country who campaigned for DVST. It is likely that the scandal affected the election results and the DVST party did not pass to the National Assembly. Therefore, the RPS was the only representative of the interests of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria⁴².

From the nationalist spectrum in Parliament there was also only one movement: “Attack”. This party United with the Patriotic front, creating a coalition party “United patriots”. The party of eurosceptics “Attack” continues to agitate voters for Bulgaria’s withdrawal from NATO, for the revision of the conditions of its membership in the European Union. “Attack” is also in solidarity with Putin’s policy, supports the annexation of Crimea, the abolition of anti-Russian sanctions. Its leader, V. Siderov is in contact with the leader of the French far-right party “national front” Marine Le Pen, and their views are similar on rapprochement with Russia and strengthening the migration regime⁴³.

A political debutant also entered the Parliament – a liberal party “Freedom”, which has no clear political identity. This is the personal project of businessman Veselin Mareshki. He was a candidate for the presidency in the 2016 elections. More than 400 thousand Bulgarian citizens voted for him at that time. In the parliamentary elections of 2017, the achievements of

⁴² Чурсин А. Турция вмешалась в болгарские выборы. В отношениях двух стран – новый кризис. URL: <https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2017/03/18/71827-turtsiya-vmeshalas-v-bolgarskie-vybory> [odczyt: 11.04.2018].

⁴³ Выборы в Болгарии: Кто здесь «тройанский конь» Кремля? URL: <https://112.ua/statji/vybory-v-bolgarii-kto-zdes-troyanskiy-kon-kremlya-379909.html> [odczyt: 11.04.2018].

“Freedom” turned out to be more modest, since a little more than 140 thousand people voted for the party⁴⁴.

The results of the parliamentary elections only confirmed the existence of a new trend in Bulgarian politics. For one reason or another, the most loyal adherents of the previous Euro – Atlantic paradigm – former members of the reform bloc – turned out to be outside the National Assembly. Of the parties that remained in Parliament, two – GERB and the new party “Volya” – are built around the personality of the Prime Minister and easily adapt to new conditions. For these parties, ideological issues are not a priority. GERB, for example, as a partner in the ruling coalition took the party “United patriots” instead of the Reformist bloc. Analysts believe that this choice of the GERB party in these conditions can be regarded almost as a symbol of the changes taking place in Bulgarian society.

Thanks to the political power of the “United patriots” nationalist parties for the first time in recent Bulgarian history received a place in the government. The BSP, whose popularity has increased after the victory in the presidential elections of R. Radev, tries not to lose its rating and continues the course of patriotism and pragmatic policy initiated by the President. Following the events of December 2015, when the FTA broke away from it, the RPC resolutely abandoned the role of a conductor of Turkey’s interests and declared Bulgaria’s security and prosperity as its top priority. Since then, its political rhetoric has often seemed even more patriotic than that of nationalist parties.

Summary. Thus, the first post-Communist party system of the Republic of Bulgaria underwent significant changes after the parliamentary elections of 2001. In Bulgaria there was a stratification of the right bloc, the transformation of the BSP was completed, which led to the transition to a new party system. The second post-Communist party system, which was born as a multi-party system, has also undergone dynamic changes after the parliamentary elections in 2005 and 2009. Its evolution depends on new cleavages (that appeared and will appear), what will happen in the inner party relations, as it will affect the change in electoral preferences and party identification. The evolution of the party system is a long process, which is influenced by the new social structure of society, its values, changes in the political culture of citizens and political class, as well as “political construction” due to changes in the electoral legislation and the electoral system of the Republic.

The victory in the 2016 presidential election of R. Radev had a significant impact on new alliances in the political arena. Prior to the elections, GERB collaborated with the Reformist bloc, which had disputes about whether to continue to cooperate with B. Borisov. The Turkish minority and nationalist parties, which until recently provided GERB with partial support in Parliament, are likely to develop cooperation with the left political forces, and their electorate strongly supported R. Radev in the presidential elections.

⁴⁴ Новый болгарский парламент будет состоять из представителей пяти партий. URL: <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/4128450> [odczyt: 11.04.2018].

The Bulgarian Parliament quickly changed to a new paradigm of political rhetoric, while almost without changing its structure (GERB still leads the government coalition, the BSP and the DPS, as before are in opposition, and the nationalists – support GERB). “Pro-Euro-Atlantic” parties (Reformist bloc, DVST) failed to pass to Parliament, and those that are represented in the National Assembly (GERB, BSP, RPS) quite quickly and painlessly shifted to “patriotic” or “statist” rhetoric. The nationalist parties, which are most in line with the new situation, were able to understand the situation in time: they united and in a new form were able to get seats in the government. Therefore, the nationalist political forces have made a bid to say goodbye to their previous role in Bulgarian politics and to join the respectable participants of the political process.

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