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EUROPE AND THE BULGARIAN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION,
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**Lyubka Savkova and Dragomir Stoyanov
Email: Lgs2307@hotmail.com, dragomirstoyanov@gmail.com**

Key Points:

- Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria nearly won an outright majority in parliament, securing 116 out of 240 seats, which is an almost identical result to that achieved by the centrist-liberal party of the former Bulgarian king Simeon II, National Movement for Stability and Progress, at the 2001 parliamentary election.
- The election was conducted following the introduction of a new mixed electoral system where voters independently cast votes for candidates and parties.
- The election presented an opportunity for eight parties and coalitions to enter parliament, which would have been the most diverse result since the first free elections in Bulgaria in 1990.
- Protest, anti-system and nationalist parties and coalitions (Attack, the 'Law, Order and Justice' Party, Lider and the New Time, Guards and the Coalition for the Motherland) became prominent during the election campaign but only Attack and the 'Law, Order and Justice Party' won seats in the National Assembly.
- The tone of the election campaign among all parties, except for Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria and the National Movement for Stability and Progress, was aggressive and often aimed at the actions and leadership of the ethnically Turkish party, the Movement for Rights and Freedoms, which mobilised the Turkish vote.
- The issue of vote buying was widespread especially among the Turkish and Roma minorities who bartered their votes for insignificant material incentives such as food, coal, free transportation and even religious rituals.
- A record number of arrested individuals applied to take part in the election campaign in a bid to take advantage of a loophole in the law which provided immunity to election candidates. The most famous of these were the Galevi brothers who had a notorious reputation of economic blackmail and criminality in the region of Dupnitsa.

- The turnout (60.5%) was influenced by the mobilisation of the ethnic vote, the proximity between the European Parliament (EP) and parliamentary elections, which led to a very long election campaign and the popularity of Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria's charismatic leader Boyko Borissov.

Background

The July 2009 parliamentary election in Bulgaria was held only one month after the European Parliament (EP) election¹ which led to an unusually long election campaign. The confrontational context in which the election took place and the result confirmed what was already known about the positions of political parties and the Bulgarian party system from the EP elections.

Two of the parties from the governing coalition (the Coalition for Bulgaria and the National Movement for Stability and Progress) suffered humiliating defeats while the Movement for Rights and Freedoms gained more votes than in the last parliamentary election in 2005.² This result is often characteristic of the end of a parliament when voters wish to punish the incumbent government. The coalition spent the first two years (2005-2007) on achieving Bulgaria's timely accession to the EU which was followed by two years (2007-2009) of addressing harsh criticisms from the European institutions regarding corruption and attempts to (un)freeze EU funds. The second stage coincided with the global economic crisis and the energy disputes between Ukraine and Russia, both of which made it difficult to fulfill pledges from the Socialist election programme that related to social welfare and an independent foreign policy. The supporters of the Coalition for Bulgaria were disappointed that the party prioritised the demands of the European institutions compared to more bread and butter issues that traditionally featured in the party's election programmes and manifestos.

The National Movement for Stability and Progress lost the same number of votes as the Socialists when compared to 2005 and failed to pass the threshold for parliamentary representation which was the expected outcome prior to the election. The party's popularity has long been decreasing and its success in electing two MEPs in the EP election a month earlier was credited to the reputation of Meglena Kuneva, the (now former) Bulgarian EU Commissioner and not to the party itself. The result of the parliamentary election confirmed the uncertainty of the Movement's future and its departure from front line politics was re-affirmed by the resignation of its leader, the former king Simeon II upon the announcement of the election results. Most of the party's erstwhile supporters voted for Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria, which shared similarities with National Movement for Stability and Progress such as a

¹ For an overview of the 2009 EP election in Bulgaria, see: Lyubka Savkova, 'European Parliament Elections in Bulgaria, May 20 2007', *European Parties Elections and Referendum Network Briefing No.23* at <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/sei/documents/epern-ep-bulgaria07.pdf>.

² For an overview of the 2005 Bulgarian parliamentary election, see: Lyubka Savkova, 'Europe and the Parliamentary Election in Bulgaria, 25th June 2005', *European Parties and Referendums Network Briefing No. 21* at http://www.sussex.ac.uk/sei/documents/epern-eb-bulgaria_2005.pdf.

charismatic leader and a centre-right election programme. The National Movement's supporters were dissatisfied with the pace of reforms, the split within the party, the lack of vision and leadership, the authoritarian leadership style of Simeon and his ambition to reconstitute (on dubious grounds) a vast number of estates and land that belonged to the royal family before its abdication from the Bulgarian throne.

The least affected by the election outcome was the Movement for Rights and Freedoms, the Turkish minority party, which was the smallest coalition partner in the outgoing government. At the June 2009 EP elections, the party lost some marginal supporters but managed to regain its position from the last parliamentary election and even increased its representation of MPs. This unexpected result can be explained by the strong anti-Turkish rhetoric adopted by all the other parties in the course of the election campaign which acted as a mobilising force for the minority electorate. In some cases, such as with the Law, Order and Justice party, the very essence of their election campaign was constructed on anti-Movement for Rights and Freedoms slogans and pledges. Moreover, whereas in the past only right wing parties such as Attack took issue with the Movement, in this election the Bulgarian Socialists, the National Movement for Stability and Progress and Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria distanced themselves from past and future coalitions with the Turkish party. This added to an already existing pool of opponents such as Attack, Lider and the Blue Coalition. Other factors that contributed to the Movement's election outcome were the basic level of education of voters who were fairly unconcerned with national issues, an active election campaign led by the party leader Ahmed Dogan (who made a point of visiting areas with marginal seats) and a very well mobilised party network that provided strong 'incentives' (usually money, but also clothes, flour, rice, coal, and on this occasion, even free marriage blessings!) in exchange for votes.

The clear winner at this election was Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria with 116 out of 240 seats. Their result was credited to the charismatic personality of the party's de-facto leader, Boyko Borissov, which compensated for a slow and uneventful campaign, lack of clarity in manifesto pledges, and unfamiliar candidates in the party lists. The success of Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria was compared with a similar election result achieved by National Movement for Stability and Progress, the party of the former Bulgarian king, in 2001. The difference between the two election wins was that, while in 2001 the National Movement for Stability and Progress's electorate was consolidated around the theme of national unity, in 2009 the dominant topic of the Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria's election campaign was political revanchism against the governing coalition (comprising the Coalition for Bulgaria, National Movement for Stability and Progress, and the Movement for Rights and Freedoms). The electorate of Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria was the same as that of National Movement for Stability and Progress: mostly professional, young, urban and well educated. It is notable that the party did worse outside of the capital, in rural and minority areas of the country, and among elder voters.

An interesting feature of the election was the record number of protest, anti-system and nationalist parties taking part in the campaign such as Attack, the 'Law, Order and

Justice' Party, the Guards and the Coalition for the Motherland. All of them emphasised anti-corruption measures, strong leadership and an intention to expose the incumbent coalition government's corruption schemes. The new parties were either represented by former personnel from the army or with army links (the Coalition for the Motherland and the Guards) or financed by former security services personnel as in the case of the 'Law, Order and Justice' Party. From the myriad of protest parties, Attack kept its representation from 2005 and the 'Law, Order and Justice' Party passed the threshold securing some seats following a very expensive and visible election campaign. Both parties took issue with the leadership of Movement for Rights and Freedoms and the Turkish electorate in general. Comparatively, the 'Law, Order and Justice's campaign was more aggressive under the motto: 'To Stop the Doganisation!' (referring to the leader of Movement for Rights and Freedoms), while Attack highlighted more practical pledges such as to lobby for the discontinuation of news in Turkish on national TV or a reduction in the number of mosques in rural areas. It is significant that both parties pledged support for Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria during the election campaign and welcomed the possibility of governing in coalition with the new party.

The Blue Coalition, which encapsulated some of the main democratic political parties such as the United Democratic Forces and Democrats for a Strong Bulgaria, was a loser in this election as it achieved fewer votes than the individual share of each one of those parties in 2005. Following years of divisions and splits prior to the EP election, the United Democratic Forces and Democrats for a Strong Bulgaria joined forces, although their union was marred by disputes about whether the Coalition should be formed. As the election result demonstrated, the political right in Bulgaria was in a state of flux leaving vacuum for new parties like Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria to fill the space. Nevertheless, the Blue Coalition emerged as a natural ally of Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria in the next parliament as both parties belonged to the same EP political grouping and had many pledges and priorities in common.

Finally, one technical aspect of the election needs to be clarified. Following amendments to the electoral law prior to the election, a new (mixed) electoral system was introduced for a first time in Bulgaria. Under the rules each voter had the right to cast two votes in the election: one for a party and one for an individual candidate. The new system was meant to encourage reputable individuals, known in their regions, to come forward to be elected with the support of parties. That was seen as a way of popularizing the role of politics and making the electoral process more transparent. In practice, the majority of parties (excluding Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria) opted for experienced politicians leaving new candidates at the bottom of their party lists.

The Election Campaign

The 2009 national election campaign opened two months before Election Day with intensive rhetorical interaction between the opposition and governing parties. The atmosphere of the campaign and the behaviour of the major parties were influenced by the result and political discourse following the European Parliament Election which took

place one month prior to the national contest. The main features of the campaign were strong competition, extensive usage of media advertising, few populist initiatives, excessive spending, and strong personalization of the whole campaign.

Throughout the campaign the three parties of the governing coalition that took Bulgaria into the EU in 2007 were strongly criticised by the main opposition parties for their failure to ensure that the country's absorption of the potential benefits from EU membership materialised in the aftermath of accession. This theme struck a cord with a large group of disappointed voters who shared the belief that the incumbent government was struggling to deepen Bulgaria's integration into the EU as well as failing to fulfill its membership obligations, thereby compromising Bulgaria's reputation as a new EU member state.

The Coalition for Bulgaria

The Coalition for Bulgaria remained true to its established campaigning style of direct contact with voters and active participation in the election campaign. On this occasion the main challenge was to re-buff persistent claims of opposition parties that during its time in power the Socialists had mismanaged key sectors of the economy such as finance, energy and regional development. To defend its reputation the Coalition for Bulgaria repeatedly reminded voters of the growing macro-economic stability of the Bulgarian economy measured by the share of foreign direct investment and economic growth of approximately 5% which was in contrast to the declining economic climate in Europe as a result of the global economic crisis.

One of the Coalition's main campaign slogans was 'We did a lot but we know that it is not enough', a message that suggested a continuation of the same line of policy making and asking for the voters' continuous support to implement it. Another slogan, 'We are on your side', reminded voters of the well established relationship between the party and its core supporters, the majority of whom came from impoverished suburban areas of the country. True to this sentiment, the party program 'Reasonable government for stability and change' outlined social priorities that were close to the heart of Socialist voters such as agriculture, health care and education, and the need for 'zero tolerance towards corruption'.

The Coalition for Bulgaria's election campaign differed from their past ones by the equal proportion of defensive and offensive statements. In the past, the party had remained relatively moderate and distant from confrontation with other parties. In this election it did not hesitate to put into work some dirty tricks which had a negative effect on their election result such as producing two television clips: one stating that 'Whoever supports Boyko Borisov (the most popular opposition politician and informal leader of Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria), supports Ivan Kostov (leader of Democrats for Strong Bulgaria and a politician with a low level of public support)'; and a second one showing an axe falling onto the main state owned companies such as the national air carrier Balkan and images from the social and health care sectors. According to the

official documents the cost of the Socialist Party's campaign was estimated at 1 999 052 BGN.

It is worth pointing out that the Socialist Party failed to make the most out its most visible achievement during the past term - Bulgaria's accession into the EU - as membership could not be separated from the criticisms of the post-accession period. This, coupled with the miscalculated strategic decision to rely on established career politicians in the party lists in the face of declining level of public support, were important aspects of the election campaign that influenced the party's result.

The National Movement for Stability and Progress

The National Movement for Stability and Progress' election campaign stood out from the campaigns of other parties with the strong focus on personalities, Simeon II and Meglena Kuneva, as well as the lack of negative messages and rhetoric against other parties. The personalisation aspect can be explained by the fact that the party had never been in opposition since its establishment in 2001 although its popularity and importance in Bulgarian politics had steadily decreased over the years. Prior to the election the prognosis was that the party might not succeed in passing the threshold for representation, although it had been one of leading parties to pursue EU membership. Naturally, to increase its popularity during the course of the campaign the National Movement emphasised the personalities of Kuneva - the first Bulgarian EU Commissioner, who has a well established positive image in Bulgaria - and Simeon II, the founder and leader of the National Movement, who signed Bulgaria's EU Accession Treaty in 2004.

The National Movement's campaign was strongly positive and pro-European. Its orientation mainly towards younger and better educated voters was evident in the emphasis that it put on the party's success in transforming the dreams of many Bulgarians into reality: 'Bulgaria, a European Union member state'. The name of the party platform 'Life in accordance with the rules - the politics that Bulgaria needs' indicated the will to integrate Bulgaria within the EU so that it enjoyed the benefits from being an EU member state as well as the fact that it played an active role in decision making in key areas of the Union such as enlargement, regional policy, nuclear energy, and agriculture. This was the only election campaign that had an educational and informative tone regarding the nature of EU membership, which was communicated to voters through a series of TV and radio interviews with the (now former) Commissioner Meglena Kuneva. The reported amount of the money spent on the campaign was in line with other parties, estimated at 996,943 BGN.

The Movement for Rights and Freedoms

Throughout the whole election campaign, the Movement for Rights and Freedoms was the most aggressively criticised of the three governing parties against which the major opposition parties from the political right, such as Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria and the Blue Coalition, as well as those with nationalist and

populist identities such as Attack and 'Law, Order and Justice' Party constructed their election campaigns. The Movement was linked to: a series of high profile scandals of resource mis-management by associates of the party leadership, the promotion of oligarchic interests by the Movement's leader Ahmed Dogan, and more generally about the draining of EU funds and mis-management in the agricultural and environment sectors where the party had a high profile role. Other topics discussed in the past, such as the theme of lustration, re-surfaced by other parties exposing a number of candidates from the Movement of Rights and Freedoms who collaborated with the Communist regime as well as some who took part in the assimilation experiment in the late 1980s. The sensitivity about having the news read in Turkish on Bulgarian National Television and the growing number of mosques were some of the topics that the Turkish minority party had to engage with in the course of the campaigning period.

The anti-Movement for Rights and Freedoms spirit of the 2009 election campaign had a mobilising effect on the Movement's core supporters and, as the election result shows, the party was relatively unaffected by its participation in the governing coalition. The party's core electorate had always been ethnic Turks from countryside areas who were mainly concerned with local issues such as: road infrastructure, investment in the tobacco and agricultural sectors, EU subsidies for farming, and the party's support for Turkey's prospective EU membership. The main party slogan during the campaign was 'Vote with confidence, find support and security' and the party programme 'From formal membership to real integration' highlighted the importance of policy sectors such as the economy, agriculture, education and national security.

The tone of the Movement's election campaign was confident and the campaign itself was structured around the appearances of party leader Ahmed Dogan who made a number of shocking statements in front of supporters and functionaries that focused public attention on the party activities. The most memorable of these occurrences was a statement by Mr Dogan where he claimed that he was the most important person in the country with the power to distribute the financial resources of the state.

The campaign was marked by a generous distribution of 'incentives' in the form of money, rice, bread, meat and even free marriage rituals for selected voters, which had been the hallmark of all the Movement's election campaigns during the post-communist period. Given the new mixed electoral system, a successful decision by the party leadership was to present a diverse image of the party by promoting individuals with established reputations in their local areas, as well as more young, female, and ethnically Bulgarian, Armenian and Roma candidates, in their party lists.

Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria

The Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria election campaign was similar to that of National Movement for Stability and Progress in the way that it was highly personalised revolving around the activities of the party's informal leader and then mayor of Sofia, Boyko Borisov. His image of a strongman was enhanced by the media's obsession to present him as 'Batman', 'the General' and 'Robin Hood' emerging as a

protector of hard-working Bulgarians and their saviour from organised crime and corruption.

Indeed, besides the theme of eradicating organised crime and corruption from the high echelons of power, as well as re-instating EU's confidence in Bulgaria after the election, the party's electoral messages carried little substance and were vaguer than those of any of the other parties. The party's typical pledges were: to improve the lives of all Bulgarians, to bring smiles to the faces of hard working people (!), to improve road infrastructure, and to un-freeze EU funds for farming and agriculture.

As the election gathered pace, it became clear that the party's pool of potential leaders were young, Western educated and with no past experience in politics but with a good reputation in high profile organisations such as the World Bank. This observation led to comparisons with the political debut of the National Movement for Stability and Progress in 2001 which also relied on foreign educated financial professionals in key ministries. Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria rebuffed all attempts to draw similarities between its own candidates and those of the king's party. Moreover, in the last stage of the election campaign the party announced its willingness to co-operate with the right-wing parties Democrats for Strong Bulgaria and Attack following the election, but dismissed any possibility for co-operation with the Movement for Rights and Freedoms and the Socialists. A feature of Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria's election campaign was a series of public clashes between supporters of the party and those of the Bulgarian Socialist Party, which created the impression that the two of them were fighting a proxy war against one another.

The Blue Coalition

The tone of the Blue Coalition's election campaign on was nostalgic of the transition period when the United Democratic Party's government of Ivan Kostov introduced successfully a series of stabilising economic reforms in 1997-2001 following a catastrophic half-term of Zhdan Videnov's Socialist government. The campaign was constructed as an analogy with the situation in 1997 under the slogans 'The time has come', 'It is time for the good ones to come out', and 'The game is over'. The underlining message was that the Blue Coalition could take Bulgaria out of another crisis introduced by the Coalition for Bulgaria-National Movement for Stability and Progress-Movement for Rights and Freedoms coalition. The Blue coalition emerged with aspirations to participate as a junior coalition partner of Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria in a future coalition government but otherwise rejected co-operation with any other parties.

As with National Movement for Stability and Progress and Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria the Blue Coalition's election campaign revolved around its leaders, Ivan Kostov and Martin Dimitrov, and the main issues discussed in their election manifesto and in meetings with voters were proposed changes to the tax system, the economy, state administration, education and healthcare. The Blue Coalition lobbied for support from its core middle aged, urban supporters as well as voters who were

dissatisfied with the progress made during the last parliamentary term and were affected by unemployment, loss of business or benefits by the effects of the global economic crisis.

The nationalist parties: Attack and 'Law, Order and Justice'

Both of these parties competed for a share of the nationalist electorate through a series of populist pledges which identified a common 'enemy': the Movement for Rights and Freedoms and its leader Ahmed Dogan. The campaigns differed slightly in tone. Attack's election campaign had a more moderate tone repeating past issues such as the Movement for Rights and Freedom's religiously motivated politics and repression of Bulgarians living in regions with an ethnically Turkish majority, as well as the corruption of the Movement for Rights and Freedom's leadership and their excessive lifestyles. The 'Law, Order and Justice' party's was more aggressive and targeted the electorate with the motto 'To stop Doganization!'

A secondary target for Attack was the Roma population in Bulgaria which was exposed for criminal behavior and an unwillingness to participate in efforts to modernise the country. 'Law, Order and Justice' criticised the restitution of estates to the former Bulgarian king and Prime Minister Simeon II on dubious grounds. Neither party published an election programme with a set of policies it intended to follow, although they gave provisional support to Boyko Borisov and Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria.

Attack and 'Law, Order and Justice' relied on direct meetings of party leaders (Mr Siderov and Mr Yanev) with the voters where they tried to strike an image of saviours of the people. For instance, the slogans of Attack's campaign referred to its leader Volen Siderov and the mission of Attack: 'The Country Likes Him!' and 'Support Attack, Save Bulgaria!'. Similarly Mr Yanev was 'The Man for the Job!' and he aimed 'To Save the Country from the Oligarchic Clique!'

The financing of 'Law, Order and Justice' party was a main theme of the campaign which was, in this party's case, was visible and expensive. The party was formed before the 2009 EP elections with the support of circles from the Bulgarian intelligence services. During the campaigning period it transpired that 'Law, Order and Justice' had been given access to cars, mobile phones and billboards by third persons without disclosing the exact sources of sponsorship. This led to speculation that the new party was formed by the Socialists or Movement for Rights and Freedoms in order to divert votes from Attack or mobilise the support of the Turkish electorate.

The Greens

The Green party emerged as a result of established networks between several non-governmental organizations in Bulgaria. An interesting feature of their campaign was that the party actively employed all forms of social networking including on-line forums and received broad support in the big cities from young and well educated voters. Their

electoral platform titled ‘In Order for People to Remain in Bulgaria’ covered not only environmental issues but also economic and social problems such as tax reform, agriculture, health care and education; and the deep re-structuring of the country’s actual political system of the country was also given a central place in the party agenda. The officially declared campaign costs were 79,169 BGN.

Results and Analysis

Table 1: Results for the Bulgarian National Assembly Elections of July 2009 and June 2005

	2009		2005		Change (%)	Seats		
	Votes	%	Votes	%		Proportional	Majoritarian	Total
Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria	1,678,641	39.72	-	-	+ 39.72	90	26	116
Coalition for Bulgaria	748,147	17.70	1,129,196	33.98	- 16.28	40	0	40
Movement for Rights and Freedoms	610,521	14.45	467,400	14.07	+ 0.38	33	5	38
Blue Coalition	285,662	6.76	234,788 DSB 280,323 UDF	7.07 DSB 8.44 UDF		15	0	15
Attack	395,733	9.36	296,848	8.93	+ 0.43	21	0	21
Law, Order and Justice Party	174,582	4.13	-	-	+ 4.13	10	0	10
Lider	137,795	3.26	-	-	+ 3.26	0	0	0
National Movement for Stability and Progress	127,470	3.02	725,314	21.83	- 18.81	0	0	0
The Greens	21,841	0.52	-	-	+ 0.52	0	0	0
Total						209	31	240

Sources:

Parliamentary Election 2009 – Central Electoral Commission <http://rezultati.cik2009.bg>, accessed on 30 January 2010

Parliamentary Election 2005 – Central Electoral Commission <http://www.2005izbori.org/results/>, accessed on 30 January 2010

The July 2009 parliamentary election took place one month after the EP election. This led to an unusually long election campaign and resulted in similar election outcomes for most parties as well as a modest turnout of 60.5 % due to the voters’ fatigue. In this respect a comparison of the 2009 EP election result with the national assembly result revealed a fairly similar electoral positioning of the parties. As Table 1 shows, the winner in both elections was Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria, followed by Coalition for Bulgaria and in third place the Movement for Rights and Freedoms. Other participants

in the 41st National Assembly were the nationalistic party Attack, the right wing Blue Coalition and the newly formed populist 'Law, Order and Justice' Party. The loser was the National Movement for Stability and Progress which did not pass the barrier for parliamentary representation at the national election, having earlier secured two MEPs in the EP election.

Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria secured the most seats and came out as the winner of the election. Although the party did not fulfill the election forecasts of securing a full majority in parliament its result was satisfactory and very similar to the one achieved by National Movement for Stability and Progress in the 2001 parliamentary election. The party achieved the highest percentage of the vote in all age groups from 18-50 as well as in the capital and major cities. More importantly, it came first in places where in the past there were a high number of supporters of the United Democratic Forces such as Varna, Burgass, Russe and Nova Zagora. If we disaggregate the party's electorate by their past electoral preferences, it is made up of: one-eighth supporters of Attack, one-fifth supporters of the Socialist Party, one-third supporters of the right, and one-third supporters of National Movement for Stability and Progress.

The Coalition for Bulgaria lost half of its electorate from 2005 and attracted the lowest level of support measured by the number of votes (748,147 votes) since the first democratic elections in Bulgaria in 1990. The Socialists were ahead in the villages and small towns as well as among the elderly voters over 50 years old, working class, groups with limited incomes, and the less well educated.

The Movement for Rights and Freedoms achieved their biggest electoral success since 1990 by securing 38 seats within the national parliament. They managed to retain 91.3 % of those who voted for them at the 2005 national election. Their voters were mainly from the Turkish or Roma minorities and living in villages and small towns. Their ability to retain their electorate could be explained by mobilisation strategies through a system of incentives and the presence of nationalist parties such as Attack and 'Law, Order and Justice' Party that targeted the ethnically Turkish voters.

Attack came out of the election with a slightly higher result than in 2005 regardless of the presence of new nationalistic parties such as 'Law, Order and Justice', the Guards and the Coalition for the Motherland. Its appeal remained in the strong nationalistic language and memorable, simple election pledges. The profile of Attack's voters consisted of those who were dissatisfied with the status quo and the progress made during in the last electoral term. Like the party's rhetoric, its voters tended to be ethnically Bulgarian, less well educated and with limited economic means.

The rest of the parties owed their results to either: weak election campaigns, lack of vision and strategic positioning, as in the case of National Movement for Stability and Progress; internal disputes and a nostalgic appeal during the election, which is the case with the Blue Coalition; and weak structural cohesiveness and a lack of experienced party cadres in the structure of the 'Law, Order and Justice' Party.

Future Prospects

The 2009 national election confirmed what was already known about Bulgarian party politics from the EP election. Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria had the highest result without a parliamentary majority and formed a minority government. This placed the party in a position where it depended on the informal support of other parties such as the Blue Coalition, Attack and 'Law, Order and Justice'. The government spent the first post-election year on a number of high profiled campaigns consisting of a series of initiatives that targeted well established organised crime rings in various sectors such as: drug dealing, human trafficking and abductions, illegal pawn brokers, car theft, and siphoning of EU funds; which were in the past protected by the governing coalition. The unraveling of the illegal networks led to the arrest and prosecution of a number of former ministers of defence and social policy, as well as the former Prime Minister Sergei Stanishev and high profile technocrats from various administrations.

The Bulgarian Socialist Party moved into opposition and kept a low profile in the election aftermath. As with the National Movement for Stability and Progress, the efforts of both parties were directed into reforming their leadership and structures, defining a clear list of priorities before the 2011 local elections and promoting young cadres in their organisations.

For the Movement for Rights and Freedoms the election result indicated that the party could rely on its loyal supporters by keeping the same line of politics. However, the Movement's extremely good election result did not transform into participation in government.

The Blue Coalition was unlikely to make a comeback or secure a significant result at the local elections. Its role as an informal partner of Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria rather than a coalition partner (as it had expected to be before the election) limited its ability to threaten political blackmail, and with that its potential claim that the party has returned to front line politics.

Attack was well positioned to improve its result at the next election and potentially move into frontline politics after being supportive of Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria and having established a strong network of local structures. Given that the future of 'Law, Order and Justice' was insecure due to its weak leadership, lack of structures and a serious of scandals in the post-election period, Attack was likely tap into the Law, Order and Justice's electorate at the next election.

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This is the latest in a series of election and referendum briefings produced by the European Parties Elections and Referendums Network (EPERN). Based in the Sussex European Institute, EPERN is an international network of scholars that was originally established as the Opposing Europe Research Network (OERN) in June 2000 to chart the

divisions over Europe that exist within party systems. In August 2003 it was re-launched as EPERN to reflect a widening of its objectives to consider the broader impact of the European issue on the domestic politics of EU member and candidate states. The Network retains an independent stance on the issues under consideration. For more information and copies of all our publications visit our website at <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/sei/1-4-2.html>.