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Bulgaria: forecasts for the central-left government

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On 29 May, Bulgaria's parliament passed a vote of confidence for the government led by Plamen Oresharski, an economist linked to socialists. His cabinet will consist of non-partisan technocrats and politicians from the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) and the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS), which represents the Turkish minority. The centre-right party, Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB), led by former prime minister Boyko Borisov has found itself in opposition. The support level for GERB was the highest during the election in May this year, but the party did not manage to form a government coalition. The xenophobic party, Attack, is also formally in opposition to the government, but it is ready to co-operate with it on selected projects.

Commentary

- The Oresharski cabinet, despite formally being a minority government, will enjoy relatively stable support. None of the present parliamentary parties is currently interested in a snap election. Besides this, a dismissal of the government would require a total mobilisation of the opposition and the emergence of divisions within BSP or DPS, both of which are parties with good internal discipline. Therefore, the continuance of the Oresharski cabinet will depend on BSP and DPS, which will only be willing for a snap election to be held under strong public pressure or when they are certain of their victory. Both parties will politically capitalise on the quasi-technocratic formula of the Oresharski government – they will present the government's successes as their own, and will charge the technocratic government with the costs of potential failures.

- The new government will play on the wiretapping scandals and the fact that classified information was leaked from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the secret services—they will attempt to hold those involved accountable in a spectacular manner, making GERB responsible for turning Bulgaria into a 'police state'. The fact that Tsvetlin Yovchev, a technocrat linked to the centre-right president, has been nominated minister of internal affairs indicates that BSP and DPS will be implementing this plan by recruiting some of Borisov's aides. The reshuffle in the law enforcement agencies which the government has initiated offers an opportunity for credibility to be regained in this scandal-hit sector. In turn, the changes announced in the competences of the law enforcement agencies (for example, strengthening the secret service DANS at the expense of the Ministry of Internal

Affairs) may aggravate the institutional chaos in the Bulgarian security sector.

- Oresharski's economic programme envisages a moderate fiscal policy easing. It is focused on temporary short-term improvement in the situation of the poorest in society, for example by increasing the welfare benefits and introducing allowances for small- and medium-sized businesses, and at the same time it puts an emphasis on maintaining the pillars of Bulgarian economic policy: the low flat-rate tax and the currency board regime thatpegs the national currency to the euro.

- No serious changes in foreign policy should be expected as well. Although the prime minister has suggested that the construction of the Belene nuclear power plant could be resumed, which is an indication of his desire to improve relations with Russia, this idea has caused tension between BSP and DPS, and is unlikely to be pushed through. The foreign agenda will be a field of tension between the government and President Rosen Plevneliev, who is linked to GERB. However, his limited prerogatives will allow him to block only part of the actions, such as for example the announced reinstatement of the ambassadors who collaborated with the Communist security service.