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REPORT ON THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS  
IN BULGARIA

June, 1990

Prepared by the Staff of the  
U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe

July 6, 1990



This report is based on the findings of a Helsinki Commission staff delegation to Sofia, the capital of Bulgaria, as well as the Kurdzhali, Khaskovo and Kyustendil regions. In Bulgaria, Helsinki Commission staff met with a wide range of electoral officials, political party and movement representatives, as well as with candidates, journalists, voters and other observers of the Bulgarian political scene. It also observed the voting in 29 polling stations in all these regions as well as aspects of the counting of ballots in three polling stations. The staff delegation appreciates the assistance of the U.S. Embassy in Sofia and Bulgarian Desk at the Department of State, as well as the information they provided. Other valuable sources of information include Radio Free Europe (RFE-RL Daily Reports), International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), the International Human Rights Law Group (with the law firm Gibson, Dunn and Crutcher), the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, and Helsinki Watch.



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## I. HIGHLIGHTS

--Bulgaria's first free and contested elections in over 40 years were held on June 10 and 17, 1990 to choose representatives to its new parliament. Although they were marred by instances of irregularities and intimidation, the Bulgarian parties have accepted the results of the elections. In the words of one opposition leader, the elections were "free and democratic, but not completely fair."

--The Bulgarian Socialist Party (formerly, the Bulgarian Communist Party) won the elections by a narrow margin with a total of 211 of the 400 seats in the new parliament (52.7 percent).

--The opposition Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) won 144 seats (36 percent), the ethnic Turkish-based Movement for Rights and Freedoms won 23 seats (5.75 percent), and the Agrarian Union won 16 seats (4 percent).

--Despite the Socialist victory, the opposition, having won many of Bulgaria's urban areas, including Sofia (taking 24 of 26 seats), will be a major force to be reckoned with, as evidenced by its role in the resignation of President Petur Mladenov on July 6.

--Based on Commission staff election-day visits to over 30 polling places, the election process appeared to be calm, orderly and, considering the relatively brief period of time in which Bulgarians had to prepare for the elections, fairly well organized and efficient. Election procedures were consistent among precincts and problems appeared to be resolved quickly. This was consistent with the observations of other international observers.

--Representatives of different parties and independent observers monitored the majority of polling stations, thus helping to ensure the integrity of the voting process.

--Nevertheless, the elections were marred by numerous reports of irregularities and violations during the campaigning and in the elections themselves. The most serious problem appeared to be that of widespread intimidation of opposition supporters and especially voters.

--Given the 45-year legacy of Communist rule and limited democratic traditions in Bulgaria, there is little doubt that intimidation, both overt and subtle, contributed to an atmosphere of fear in the Bulgarian countryside. Central government authorities could have done

--Although the ruling Bulgarian Socialist Party clearly enjoyed a significant advantage in its access to material resources and local broadcast media, all major parties were able to communicate their messages through the media, campaign literature and public rallies and meetings.

--The Bulgarian Socialist Party, although committed to reform, faces a strong opposition. Not wanting to take sole responsibility for dealing with serious economic problems, the BSP has called for a coalition government. The opposition has so far refused to join. Both the BSP and UDF face internal divisions which may lead to further splits, thus complicating the Bulgarian political scene.

--No matter what shape it takes, the new Bulgarian government will face numerous and difficult challenges in transforming Bulgaria into a democratic, pluralistic state with a market-oriented economy.



## **THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE**

### **A. BACKGROUND**

On June 10 and 17, the first free and contested elections in postwar Bulgaria were held. While the Bulgarian Socialist Party (formerly, the Bulgarian Communist Party), won by a relatively slim margin, the opposition will undoubtedly be a force to be reckoned with. In a conversation with Helsinki Commission staff, one opposition leader summed up the elections by stating that they were "free and democratic, but not completely fair."

Bulgaria has a population of 9.3 million people and an area about the size of Ohio. Bulgaria's leader for 35 years, Todor Zhivkov, was ousted on November 10, 1989, and replaced by former Foreign Minister Petur Mladenov.

Bulgaria one of the few countries in Europe where a Communist Party remains in power. In the June elections, the party faced its first electoral battle in over four decades.

In spite of several years effort, Bulgaria had made no progress in restructuring its economy or reforming its political system. Notwithstanding repression by the authorities, domestic opposition mounted steadily after the first independent human rights groups formed in early 1988. There was a dramatic increase in the activity of these independent groups during the CSCE Sofia Environmental Meeting (October 16-November 3, 1989). Public meetings and petition gatherings by independent human rights and environmental groups such as "Ecoglasnost" culminated in a November 3 demonstration by over 4,000 people in central Sofia that demanded democracy and glasnost. This, together with the unnerving of the leadership by events in the German Democratic Republic, led to the ouster of Zhivkov (and shortly afterward, his allies), by reform-minded Communists.

The new leader, Petar Mladenov, committed himself to instituting sweeping political and economic reforms to transform Bulgaria into a "modern, democratic state, based on rule of law." Subsequently, frequent demonstrations have been held encouraging further reform efforts. Changes made include: the repeal of legislation used to imprison dissidents as well as other changes in the Criminal Code; the release of political and other prisoners; a sharp reduction in the role of the secret police; the renunciation of the Bulgarian Communist Party's monopoly on power (paving the way for multiple parties); an end to censorship and consequent opening up of the media; and a noticeable liberalization in

emigration and foreign travel.

On February 2, 1990, at a frequently contentious extraordinary session of the Bulgarian Communist Party, Alexander Lilov, a reformer, was chosen as the new Party Chairman. During the session, the Party gave up its guaranteed right to rule, adopted a more reformist manifesto and streamlined its leadership. On February 3, the National Assembly (Parliament) named reformer Andrei Lukanov Prime Minister. On February 8, Lukanov formed an all-Communist cabinet after failing to persuade the new democratic opposition (Union of Democratic Forces) to join a broad-based coalition government.

### **Roundtable Talks:**

Beginning in January 1990, the ruling Communist Party engaged in negotiations with a coalition of opposition groups, the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF), which is advocating speedier reform efforts.

On March 12, 1990, after 2 months of difficult and often-interrupted discussions, these roundtable talks achieved a major breakthrough, laying the basis for fundamental changes in the constitution by hammering out agreements on the country's political future. Later, the National Assembly codified these agreements.

One of the most significant aspects of the agreement on the political system was that it provided for elections scheduled in June 1990. The agreement called for: material state assistance for participants in the elections; elimination of the state monopoly on publishing; access to existing printing equipment; lawful receipt of material contributions from abroad; and local creation of proper conditions for equal access to local print and electronic media and for "suitable premises for polling places with necessary equipment." It also provided for inviting foreign observers, including government observers from the United States and other countries. The agreement also called for the removal of all political organizations, including Communist Party cells, from the workplace.

The other agreements committed all "political and social forces" to a "peaceful transition from a totalitarian to a democratic society," and affirmed the crucial role of the roundtable to Bulgaria's political development.

On March 30, roundtable participants signed three additional agreements. The agreement regarding amendment of the existing constitution included provisions on the basic rights and freedoms of citizens and the organization of state power during the transition.

The March 30 agreement regarding the law on political parties provided for the constitutional right of citizens to form and operate parties. The state is to provide specified material assistance to political parties, including assured access to the means of mass information. It included prohibitions on foreign assistance to political parties.

However, as a temporary, one-year measure, the agreement allowed for permissible receipt of technical and material support from "foreign organizations" in kind or in monetary equivalent.

The agreement on the electoral law scheduled the elections for June 10 and runoffs on June 17 for a "Grand National Assembly" consisting of 400 representatives chosen under a mixed system, whereby 200 members are elected by majority vote and 200 by a system of proportional representation. The Grand National Assembly is to produce a new constitution within 18 months. It will also be a "working assembly" equipped and expected to deal with the pressing problems of the nation and will have the power to enact laws and elect a head of state (by a two-thirds majority vote). The agreement provided for the right of direct election of representatives by secret ballot.

The Union of Democratic Forces opposition was successful in obtaining much of what it wanted in these agreements, including that the head of state be chosen by the Assembly rather than by direct election. On April 3, the National Assembly dissolved itself and elected the current head of state, Chairman of State Council Petur Mladenov, to a newly created presidency.

## **THE PLAYERS**

There are four major players on the Bulgarian political scene -- the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) (formerly Communist Party), the opposition Union of Democratic Forces (UDF), the Agrarian Party, which was closely allied with the ruling Communist Party until Zhivkov's downfall, and the ethnic Turkish-based Movement for Rights and Freedoms. Prior to the elections, there were over 40 smaller political parties representing a fairly broad spectrum of views, virtually all of them anti-Communist. Most of these are new parties which emerged after November 9, although some trace their roots to pre-war Bulgaria.

### **The Bulgarian Socialist Party (Communist Party)**

The Bulgarian Socialist Party (formerly, Communist Party) enjoys a built-in advantage given its 45 -- including a large apparatus and material resources. Nevertheless, various factions have emerged within the Communist Party itself, ranging from a liberal group called Road to Europe to an orthodox group of members associated with the Zhivkov era. The more orthodox Communists still maintain considerable control of the countryside, and there were widespread reports of intimidation of prospective voters. In an attempt to distance itself from the past, the Communist Party changed its name in early

April 1990 to the Bulgarian Socialist Party. In February, reform-minded Communist intelligentsia broke away from the mainstream Party and formed the Alternative Socialist Party (known by its Bulgarian initials as ASO), committing themselves to building "democratic structures."

### **The Political Opposition**

Since the beginning of the year, Bulgarian opposition parties and groups have been growing rapidly. Twenty-seven political parties and organizations met in Plovdiv on March 9-11, 1990 to discuss a unified strategy for the June elections. Participating in this unprecedented conference, which reflected the breadth of the opposition, were 15 parties and organizations in the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) as well as 6 groups in the less influential Political Opposition Bloc, and 5 non-aligned parties. While the groups failed to unite completely, they did adopt a declaration which supports the peaceful dismantling of Communist Party control through democratic elections and unified opposition activity during the election campaign.

The June elections understandably became the focus of the attention of the opposition, which contemplated strategies and means of unseating the Communists. The UDF consulted parliamentarians and electoral strategists from Britain and France. In mid-February, Secretary of State James A. Baker visited Sofia and affirmed U.S. support for "free and fair elections." In mid-March, election strategists from the U.S. Republican Institute conducted the first practical consultations with the UDF on the elections, including pre-election procedures, election-day guidelines on ballot security and voting integrity, and post-election counting techniques. Other U.S. organizations traveled to Bulgaria both before and during the elections, including the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), the International Human Rights Law Group and Helsinki Watch.

Although the Communist Party still has a clear advantage in terms of access to media, opposition newspapers are springing up and their circulation is growing, including *Democratsiya*, *Svoboden Narod* (Free People), *Ekopolitika* (Ecopolity), *Narodno Zemodelsko Zname* (People's Agrarian Banner) and others. At least 20 non-official newspapers have been started since the beginning of the year, serving as mouthpieces for the organizations they represent. According to the opposition, the Party apparatus still limits a truly free press through inadequate access to printing facilities and supplies of newsprint.

**Union of Democratic Forces.** The Union of Democratic Forces (UDF), the strongest opposition grouping, was founded in December 1989, and includes most of the key opposition groups and parties, including the independent trade union Podkrepa, the environmental group Ecoglasnost, the Bulgarian Social-Democratic Party, the Federation of Clubs for Glasnost and Democracy, Citizens' Initiative and Committee for Religious Rights, the Club for the Victims of Repression after 1945, the Independent Students' Society and the Independent Society for the Defense of Human Rights. Over 10 other newly-formed or revived parties have associated themselves with the Union of Democratic Forces. In early May, the United Democratic Center, comprised of many leading independent technocrats and specialists, joined the UDF. Given the differences that exist among the various groups within UDF, an eventual split cannot be ruled out.

**The Movement for Rights and Freedoms.** The Movement for Rights and Freedoms is essentially concerned with the fate of the ethnic Turkish minority. Led by Ahmed Dogan, the association advocates the promotion of Turkish language and culture, including some Turkish language instruction in schools, Turkish-language books, newspapers, radio, TV, theater and films, the right to teach Muslim traditions and the restoration of mosques. It resisted efforts by the UDF to join forces in the elections, reportedly because the UDF, to avoid alienating different segments of Bulgarian society, has been less vocal on the ethnic Turkish question. Nevertheless, a few days before the election, Mr. Dogan stated that his party would support the UDF in those constituencies where his association would not be represented.

**Agrarians.** The Bulgarian Agrarian National Union (BANU) somewhat echoes the BSP, reflecting its long-time association with the Communists. Since the 1950's, it has been controlled by the Communist Party, but in December 1989, it decided to act as an independent opposition party. During the campaign, another faction of the Agrarians, the Nikola Petkov faction, flirted with the "official" BANU Agrarians, but decided to stay within the UDF coalition, thereby enhancing UDF's chances of victory. This group is a revival of Nikola Petkov's opposition Bulgarian Agrarian National Union of the late 1940's and was formally revived in December 1989. (Petkov, an Agrarian leader who led the opposition to the Communist takeover in Bulgaria was executed in 1947.)

**Other Parties.** The Political Opposition Bloc (POB), which is to the right of the Union of Democratic Forces, includes six parties -- the Bulgarian National Democratic Party, the Liberal Democratic Party, the Independent Democratic Party, the Party of Free Democrats, the Party of Liberty and Progress, and the Christian Republican Party. The POB differs from all other political alliances in Bulgaria in that its ranks do not include a single Communist. However, the future of the Political Opposition Bloc and at least 20 other small political parties is uncertain, given their weak showing in the elections.

## II. ISSUES

### Economic

The current Communist leadership has inherited a centralized command economy dominated by decades of inefficiency, corruption and shortages. The leadership itself is only beginning to obtain a clear picture of the precise state of the economy following four decades of inaccurate or misleading economic statistics. In addition, there exists an acute shortage of managers/technocrats to implement reforms. Bulgaria has a \$10 billion foreign debt. In March 1990, Prime Minister Lukanov froze repayments on the debt (principal, but not interest), a move that did not enhance the confidence of foreign investors in the Bulgarian economy.

Prime Minister Lukanov has proposed reforms to move Bulgaria from a centrally planned economy to a market economy, stating that "there is no alternative to a market economy in Bulgaria." Proposed reforms include increasing the economic independence of enterprises, freeing prices from state control, and offering options for private, cooperative, and state ownership of property. The Government would also take measures to consolidate state finances, bring foreign indebtedness under control, and to provide social welfare, including unemployment benefits, for those who may suffer temporarily during the reform process. According to Lukanov, the Government would give priority to agriculture, food and light industry, trade, services and tourism.

### Minorities

On December 29, 1989, the Government decided to restore the rights of ethnic Turks and other Muslim minorities (approximately 15 percent of the population), a reversal of Zhivkov's campaign of forcible assimilation, which forced Turks to change their names and prohibited them from speaking Turkish and practicing Islam. Following the decision, there were protests against the restoration of minority rights. Mistrust between ethnic Bulgarians and Turks has its roots in 500 years of rule by the Ottoman Empire. This traditional mistrust was fanned by Zhivkov's assimilation policy and anti-Turkish propaganda. Also, there is strong evidence that these demonstrations were fueled by hard-line Communists trying to divert the country from democratic reforms and by local Party officials concerned about losing their jobs.

On January 12, 1990, an unprecedented citizens' commission, including Party officials, opposition leaders, ethnic Turks and Bulgarian nationalists presented a resolution to the National Assembly intended to settle the dispute. On January 15, the National Assembly adopted an 11-point declaration to clarify the minorities' rights. The declaration provided that all Bulgarian citizens are equal before the law, every citizen has the right to freedom of religion and to freely choose a name; the Bulgarian language is the official

state language, although in private conversation citizens may use any other language they wish.

On March 5, the National Assembly approved a law allowing both ethnic Turks and Pomaks (ethnic Bulgarian Muslims) to restore their Islamic names. The law requires a court procedure at which two witnesses must support the application, and a judge may still deny the application. Beginning on January 1, 1991, a fee will be imposed for the procedure. Reports indicate some dissatisfaction with the law in some of the Pomak regions and mistrust of the Government's intentions.

Conditions have generally improved for the Turks and Pomaks, but human rights problems persist. During the June elections, a Commission staffer observing elections in the region of Kurdzhali noted a considerably freer atmosphere for ethnic Turks than during previous visits in September 1987 and October 1989. Attendance at mosques is increasing, people are permitted to freely speak Turkish, and circumcision is generally permitted (for children above the age of five and only if performed in a hospital). But Turkish-language newspapers and radio broadcasts are prohibited, and Turkish-language instruction is not offered in schools or universities. Reports continue of violations of minority rights by local officials who do not comply with national directives to restore these rights.

With the election of 23 representatives of Ahmet Dogan's Movement for Rights and Freedoms to the Grand National Assembly, ethnic Turks now will have some say in determining their own destiny for the first time since 1944. Other religious and ethnic groups that are playing a more visible and active role, including Christians, Jews and Gypsies, are also now being given the opportunity to participate more fully in Bulgarian political life.

## Platforms

Issues dominating the campaign centered on the political and economic transformations necessary for democracy. Virtually all parties agreed on the need to transform Bulgaria into a democratic state in which human rights would be guaranteed. The Communist Party, despite its April 1990 name-change, has had a difficult time proving that it has reinvigorated and restructured itself, especially as liberal "factions" of the Bulgarian Socialist Party, such as the ASO (the Alternative Socialist Organization), have emerged.

The Bulgarian Socialist Party platform utilizes the language of reform, focusing on the "building of democratic socialism," and attempts to distance itself as far as possible from the Zhivkov era -- the "dictatorship of the time before November 10, 1989, which was a dictatorship not only over the people but over the party as well." The platform promises peaceful transition to democracy and the guarantee of rights and security to everybody, including minorities.

The BSP supports the need for a market economy "combined with modern state control," stating that socialism is not incompatible with private property, and declares itself for "an equality-based competition of the cooperative, state, municipal, stockholding and private forms of property in Bulgaria." The BSP platform also calls for placing the land in the hands of those who "wish to cultivate and use it efficiently." According to Prime Minister Lukanov, in an April 12 meeting with a visiting Helsinki Commission delegation, all of the various political forces agree on the need for a market economy, and only the pace of reform is the issue. The BSP does not favor a Polish approach of "shock therapies" -- it emphasizes the importance of maintaining the relative stability of the economy and "minimizing the pain," such as unemployment and inflation. The BSP favors guaranteeing the social security of workers and the "socially disadvantaged strata of the population."

The opposition election platform of the Union of Democratic Forces, the major opposition coalition consisting of 16 parties, calls for the establishment of "an independent, democratic and prosperous state of Bulgaria." The platform is highly critical of the ruling Bulgarian Socialist Party, characterizing it as a "carrier of inherent moral corruption, managerial cynicism and criminality." Clearly, the approach of the opposition attempts to associate the BSP as much as possible with the Zhivkovite past and not to allow it to distance itself from its past history.

The opposition platform calls for the separation of powers to the executive, judiciary, and legislative; the depoliticization of the Army, militia, and the courts; independence of the media; equality of all ethnic groups and the safeguarding of minority rights; and broad participation of all citizens in the management of the country. The platform suggests a reduction in the length of service in the military to 12 months. In the economic sphere, the UDF promises to restore private ownership with a few exceptions such as mineral resources and water. Priority should be given to private ownership. The platform promises agrarian reform and a return of land to the people who "owned it before the forcible collectivization or to their successors," as opposed to the BSP's position that the land go to those who cultivate it. (If records of original owners of the land cannot be found, those wishing to cultivate it will be allowed to own it, but only after several years of working on it.) The platform envisions a transition to a market economy with constitutionally guaranteed equality between private, municipal and state property and views "private capital" as "the true motive power of economic life." The UDF platform also addresses the environment, and health care and other social welfare issues. Minimum wage and unemployment insurance, for instance, would be retained.

Throughout the campaign, the Union of Democratic Forces emphasized several themes, including holding the Bulgarian Socialist Party to account for its past record of repression and arguing that the Union of Democratic Forces truly offers Western-style democracy and protection for the rights of individuals.



Leading members of the Union of Democratic Forces have complained that the ruling Communists have consistently taken UDF initiatives and incorporated them into the BSP platform and have accused the BSP of advantages in material resources and media access.

The platform of the official Bulgarian Agrarian National Union (BANU) somewhat echoes that of the BSP, reflecting its long-time association with the Communists. The program of the Nikola Petkov faction of the Agrarians, which is linked with the UDF, is to provide a democratic Agrarian alternative to the official Bulgarian Agrarian National Union and to campaign for democracy and a market economy based on private agriculture.

### III. THE ELECTION LAW AND CAMPAIGNING

#### A. RIGHT TO VOTE AND NOMINATE CANDIDATES

The election law provides for the establishment of a Grand National Assembly to consist of 400 representatives. It will function as a working parliament for 18 months while it drafts a new constitution. The electoral system will be a mixture of majority and proportional representation. Half of the 400 seats in the Assembly will be taken through the direct election of candidates in single-member election regions based on the majority principle with a majority consisting of 50 percent of the vote plus one. The remaining 200 seats will be filled through a proportional election system in multi-mandated territorial units based on party lists. The proportional representation system follows the mathematical formula used by the Federal Republic of Germany. Each voter will be entitled to two votes: one for a candidate to be elected by majority vote and one for the list of a party running in a multi-seat constituency. There are 28 multi-member electoral districts corresponding to the 28 former districts that were replaced in 1987 by 9 larger administrative regions.

A party needs to have at least 4 percent of the votes in all electoral districts to be eligible for the distribution of the seats. Each of the eligible parties will be allocated a number of seats proportionate to the votes it has gained. According to election experts, such a system enhances the ability of a majority government to govern more effectively, while providing the minority parties with a voice.

The 200 single-mandate majority districts were supposed to be of equal population, although some districts had variations in population.

If less than half of the electorate in a given district votes, or if none of the candidates in a single-mandate district receives a majority, the law specified a runoff election on June 17. The two candidates receiving the most votes proceed to the runoffs. There are no provisions for write-in candidates.

All people 18 years and older, with the exception of those in prison or "convicted of judicial disability," can vote without distinction to sex, religion or ethnicity. The election is by secret ballot.

According to the election law, candidates may be nominated and proposed for registration by the leaderships of the parties or party election coalitions, or they may be nominated in writing by at least 500 voters in an electoral district. The candidate must submit a written statement agreeing to the nomination. Candidates can be registered only in one single-member electoral district and only on one party list of candidates, and they

are not required to reside in the electoral district. Registration takes place 30 days before election day. In the event of the district electoral commission's denial of registration, the prospective candidate can appeal to the Central Electoral Commission. The small number of difficulties in the registration of candidates was resolved. But some concerns were manifested over the way in which political parties chose their candidates. Apparently, candidates from all of the major parties were not proposed by the grass roots membership.

On May 18, the Central Electoral Commission announced that 3,143 candidates had registered for the June 10 multiparty elections. Over 1,400, or an average of approximately 7 candidates, ran in each of the 200 single-seat constituencies. An average of about 8 - 9 candidates, or nearly 1,700 individuals representing 38 parties, competed in each of 28 multi-seat constituencies. Although 40 parties and coalitions registered to participate, the main competitors were the Bulgarian Socialist Party, the Union of Democratic Forces, and the Bulgarian Agrarian Union.

Voter registries were prepared by local people's councils or mayor's offices that maintain registries of the population, or, for the military, the commanding officer of the military unit. Prior to the elections, there were reports of some voter registries with missing names and other errors.

## **B. THE CAMPAIGN AND ACCESS TO MEDIA**

The campaign for what were the first contested elections in four decades drew a considerable amount of interest among the population. According to Zhelyu Zhelev, the Chairman of the Union of Democratic Forces, in an April 13, 1990 meeting with a visiting Helsinki Commission delegation, even "the countryside is beginning to wake up. I have attended about 20 rallies. In the front there are activists, and in the middle is the silent majority, who by the end of the rally are in agreement with the activists."

Many Bulgarians took advantage of the election law guarantees on the right to campaign freely for or against candidates. Mostly peaceful election rallies and meetings were commonplace throughout the campaign, including a June 7 UDF rally in Sofia which attracted an estimated 400,000 to 500,000 people. While many proceeded without incident, there were some reports of local government officials obstructing UDF election rallies or favoring the BSP. In Velingrad, for instance, UDF officials reported that regular bus service between villages was stopped during scheduled UDF meetings, while local government officials provided buses to the BSP for its rallies. Other rallies of the opposition were reportedly disrupted by BSP supporters. Despite these and other problems, the leaderships of the BSP and UDF called upon their followers to avoid violence and provocations and to stay calm.

Taking into account the legacy of 45 years of Communist rule and limited democratic traditions, the campaign was quite open. In general, political parties and independent candidates were able to convey their messages to the public through the mass media and at public meetings and rallies. Most individuals with whom Helsinki Commission observers talked confirmed this and expressed familiarity with the positions of at least the major parties.

The Bulgarian Socialist Party, however, by virtue of its historically dominant position, maintained a considerable advantage over the opposition in terms of access to material resources and money, including office space and other facilities, telecommunications equipment, and materials such as paper. Government officials had access to state symbols and resources. Defense Minister Dobri Dzhurov, for instance, reportedly used a state helicopter to fly to campaign rallies.

The election law provides for fair and equal access to Bulgarian radio and television, free of charge. In April, the political parties reached agreement to allow the Bulgarian Socialist Party and Union of Democratic Forces three free 20-minute television appearances per week. The Agrarian Party had 15 minutes. On Friday, June 8, the last day of the election campaign, Bulgarian television provided air time to representatives of all the political parties to present their platforms.

Nevertheless, given its dominance over the last 45 years, the BSP enjoyed a clear advantage over the opposition parties in terms of access to newsprint and means of distribution. The distribution of resources for news outlets was clearly inequitable, especially newsprint for opposition newspapers. In Stara Zagora (population of 100,000), for instance, the UDF paper was a weekly limited to a circulation of 3,500; the city of Pleven had no opposition paper. In some places, there were reports of attempts at local censorship of opposition newspapers or lack of access to local radio broadcast facilities. According to opposition representatives, this disparity was particularly pronounced in rural areas. Nevertheless, the situation improved as the campaign progressed, and the circulation of some of the leading opposition newspapers rose considerably.

Commission observers saw numerous examples of campaign literature and posters, especially of the two principal parties, in the areas it visited (Sofia, Kurdzhali, Khaskovo and villages in between). The BSP did not appear to have a predominance of campaign literature.

## Campaign Violations/Intimidation of Voters

Despite the relatively open nature of the campaign, there were reports of widespread instances of unfair campaigning and intimidation by the former Communists. There were also numerous allegations of local officials exerting undue influence in favor of BSP candidates and of bureaucratic obstacles being placed in the way of opposition campaigners (e.g., posting of campaign materials). Most were believed to have been perpetrated by local officials and not directed by the upper echelons of the BSP, although central government authorities did little to prevent intimidation. Opposition supporters were sometimes harassed or threatened with the loss of their jobs. However, most reports focused on intimidation of voters, both overt and subtle, especially of villagers and pensioners.

Allegations both of physical violence and psychological pressure were not uncommon. Among the most frequent allegations were those of pensioners being told by BSP officials that they would lose their pensions if the UDF were to win the election, and military units threatened by their superior officers with loss of home leave should the opposition win in their section. Other reports included Gypsies being told that they would lose their apartments in the event of a UDF victory. Some Gypsies reportedly were bribed to vote BSP. Additional reports indicated offers of land, building materials and food supplies to encourage voters to cast ballots for the BSP.

In a society with a 45-year legacy of Communist rule, even subtle forms of intimidation, such as the presence of the village mayor or military officer near a voting booth, has a much different impact on voting behavior than it would in a democratic society. Notwithstanding the changes that have taken place, the element of fear has not disappeared from Bulgarian society. Despite reassurances by electoral authorities on the eve of the election that voters should have no fears because the ballot was secret, and despite the difficulty in measuring both the effect and extent of intimidation, there is little doubt that fear was a factor in the elections, especially in the rural areas.

A particular issue of concern was that of physical violence. The deaths of several opposition campaigners and supporters under suspicious circumstances were most notable, including the killing of one Green Party activist by a BSP-member army officer in Shumen. Some opposition activists contended that these deaths had been politically motivated. The deaths reportedly are being investigated. While questions remain as to whether they were politically motivated, news of the deaths unfortunately served to heighten the atmosphere of fear. There were also instances of stabbings and beatings of opposition activists or supporters and tire-slashings. Threats of violence were also reported by both opposition and BSP candidates. One local UDF leader received scores of late-night telephone calls threatening to find and kill him and rape his 6-year-old daughter. Several BSP leaders also claimed that they had been threatened with physical violence.

On May 21, 1990, more than 30 opposition political organizations, including the Union of Democratic Forces, refused at a publicly televised ceremony to sign a pledge of

non-violence and observance of legality and human rights during the election campaign. While the opposition agreed in principle with the election campaign pledge, it felt that authorities used the agreement as a propaganda ploy. The UDF charged authorities with violating round-table accords on the elections by ignoring irregularities. According to Zhelyu Zhelev, problems cited included: "falsification of electoral lists, illegal acts by mayors and Communist Party secretaries, difficulty in publicizing activities at military camps, the monopoly of local mass media by the Communist Party and the fact that some election committees are closed to representatives of the UDF."

Despite these problems, the atmosphere on the eve and day of the elections was peaceful and Commission observers witnessed little evidence of militia or troop presence or military activity in the areas it visited.

#### IV. THE BALLOTING AND RESULTS

Helsinki Commission staff observed voting in over 30 urban and rural polling places in Sofia and its environs, the Kyustendil, Kurdzhali and Khaskovo regions on election day, June 10, and observed the count at a voting precinct in the city of Khaskovo. The polling places visited served from approximately 400 to 1200 voters each. At the sites visited, Commission observers found the election process to be calm, orderly, and, considering the relatively brief amount of time in which the Bulgarians had to prepare for the elections, fairly well organized and efficient. Election procedures were largely consistent between precincts and problems that emerged were resolved quickly. Virtually every polling station visited had representatives of different parties present, thus helping to ensure the integrity of the voting process, although at least several hundred section commissions had no opposition representatives. Other international observers reported similar experiences.

##### Electoral Commissions

In accordance with the election law, the organization and conduct of the elections was assigned to three types of electoral commissions: about 6,500 section commissions, 228 district commissions (one each for the 200 single-mandate constituencies and 28 multi-mandate constituencies), and the Central Electoral Commission (CEC), consisting of 27 members. Electoral commissions at all levels were to have included representatives of the Bulgarian Socialist Party, Union of Democratic Forces, and the Agrarian Party, but apparently some of the section election commissions did not include opposition representation. The Central Electoral Commission registered the political parties' electoral coalitions, determined election results in multi-member districts and announced these results for the country as a whole. The CEC decided upon complaints about election irregularities, but decisions could be appealed to the Supreme Court. The Government covers the costs of organizing and running the election.

District electoral commissions were established for each single-mandate and multi-mandate electoral district. Responsibilities of the district commissions included establishing and coordinating the electoral sections, supplying ballot boxes, envelopes, ballots and vote-counting protocols to the sections, and tallying election results in the single-member districts based on vote-count protocols from the section.

The section electoral commissions were responsible for the actual voting process at each of the approximately 12,800 polling stations. Their duties included receiving the ballot envelopes, maintaining order at the polls, checking to make sure there are enough ballots for all candidates and parties, and enough envelopes, counting the vote, and marking and transmitting the protocols to the district electoral commission.

## **Election Day -- Balloting**

Polling took place between 7 a.m. and 6 p.m., except when voters were still waiting in line, at which time it was extended for an additional hour. Ballot boxes were closed and sealed, in the presence of commission members, aides, party workers, journalists and observers, before the balloting began. Voters were sent "invitations" to vote in advance of the election, although this invitation was not required to vote. Upon entering the polling station, the voter's name was checked off a voter registration list and passport taken. The voter was then given an envelope and entered a curtained voting booth, which contained different colored ballot papers of all parties arranged on tables within the voting booth (red for BSP, blue for UDF, orange for Agrarians and white ballots with colored lines for other parties). Before the elections, concerns arose over a potential ballot shortage, given the short preparation time and the large amounts of paper needed. But no shortage occurred. Ballots were also distributed among voters in advance.

The voter then selected two ballots -- a smaller one for the single-mandate district candidate and a larger one for the party list -- and placed both in the envelope provided. Upon leaving the voting booth, the voter deposited the envelope in the ballot box in full view of the section election commission and observers. His name was then checked off the registry and passport returned to him.

According to the election law, voting was to take place only within the voting booth inside the voting station, and only the voter was allowed in the voting booth to cast his ballot, except in a limited number of circumstances (i.e. blind or disabled), and only if assistance was requested.

In the polling stations visited by Commission observers, the election process ran smoothly and procedures were followed consistently, with relatively minor variations. Order at the polling places was maintained and the atmosphere was calm and even good-humored. At some of the polling places, there were a few problems with individuals whose names were not on the registers. For the most part, they were permitted to vote and questions were to be referred to the district election commissions. In one instance in Kurdzhali, a man who had lost his passport and who had been given a document from the local soviet was not permitted to vote because there was a one-digit discrepancy between the number on the document and his number on the registry.

In addition to members of the section electoral commissions representing various parties, most polling places visited by the Commission had poll watchers present from the Bulgarian Association for Free Elections (BAFE), an independent civic organization set up to guarantee free and fair elections. Approximately 2,000 international observers, including over 100 from the United States, enjoyed free access to polling stations and a considerable degree of cooperation from election officials and the Bulgarian authorities.



Most voters cast their ballots in the morning. Voter turnout was high. According to the Central Election Commission Chairman Zhivko Stalev, 6,334,415 of the country's 6,976,620 registered voters (90.79 percent), participated in the first-round of voting on June 10. The vast majority of people appeared to be comfortable with the voting procedures (with the exception of some elderly persons), and several told Commission observers that they had viewed Bulgarian television programs on how to vote. Others, mostly UDF supporters, were eager to volunteer their preferred party or candidate.

Commission observers did not witness major or systematic irregularities in the voting process, although there were reports of problems in some areas such as that of last minute campaigning (banned under electoral law), lack of blue UDF ballots, transparent voting curtains or envelopes, and BSP officials handing out red Socialist Party ballots to voters in the polling places. Fears before the election that voter registration lists would be grossly inaccurate were allayed. Registration lists appeared to be generally accurate, and it seemed that many errors were corrected prior to the vote.

Irregularities were also noted in the second-round June 17 elections, particularly people voting without proper identification. There were also reports of the presence of uniformed officers and local mayors canvassing outside polling stations. Most observers came to the conclusion that these problems were not enough to invalidate the elections. The major opposition parties accepted the results of the voting as reported, despite both formal and informal complaints that they made.

Electoral law provisions gave Bulgarian citizens abroad the opportunity to vote. These included Bulgarian citizens both working and residing permanently abroad, including political and economic emigrants. Bulgarian citizens abroad who were neither working nor permanent emigrants (i.e. less than 5 years) could vote, but only in Bulgaria. This last category affected mostly ethnic Turks who had left Bulgaria for Turkey during last summer's mass exodus. With respect to voting by Bulgarians in the United States, the Commission has received reports from Bulgarian-Americans of inadequate information and even disinformation about the election and various obstructions placed to discourage voting. As a result, few Bulgarian-Americans participated in the vote.

## Election Day -- Results

In accordance with the election law, after the polls were closed, unused ballots were packaged and sealed before the opening of the ballot box. Members of the section electoral commission compared the number of voters marked off on the registry list with the number of envelopes. In the polling station in Khaskovo (in which Helsinki Commission observers witnessed part of the counting of the ballots) an initial discrepancy of one (out of 509 total ballots cast) was resolved after the third recount. The envelopes were then opened and counted. Helsinki Commission observers did not observe any invalid ballots (i.e., completely torn, with additional names or writing on them, or more than one ballot of a different color for either the single-mandate candidate or a party list). In a few instances, there were two identical ballots in the same envelope but these were simply considered as one ballot. All of the members of the section electoral commission were involved in the count and all appeared to be thorough in following the necessary procedures in the vote count, meticulously tallying the ballots. In addition, local Bulgarian observers and a journalist also witnessed the vote count.

Upon completion of the vote tally, commissions recorded the results on a protocol, noting any irregularities. One copy of the protocols was sent to the respective district electoral commission and another, along with election materials, to the municipal people's councils or mayor's offices.

The district electoral commissions tabulated and announced voting results for each district on the basis of protocols submitted by each section. For multi-mandate electoral districts, the district electoral commissions forwarded the protocols to the Central Electoral Commission.

According to the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, "no party presented conclusive evidence that tampering occurred in the reporting or tabulating of the results of individual parties or candidates." Despite some complaints and discrepancies, for the most part, representatives of political parties at the polling stations signed the protocol without comment. Some concern was expressed over the delays in announcing the results of the June 10 elections (June 12 for single-mandate, and June 14 for multi-mandate constituencies). But the early release of a parallel vote tabulation by the Bulgarian Association for Free Elections, which ended up being virtually identical to the official results, allayed suspicions of vote-count manipulation.

Complaints of vote manipulations, irregularities and intimidation were submitted to the Central Election Commission by the major parties and by BAFE. Some complaints have been addressed by the Central Electoral Commission, while others will be dealt with by the Election Verification Commission established by the Grand National Assembly.

The top vote-getters (and the only parties to break the 4 percent threshold for proportional seats) following the June 10 runoff election were the Bulgarian Socialist Party, which received 2,886,363 votes, the Union of Democratic Forces with 2,216,127, the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union with 491,500, and the Movement for Rights and Freedoms with 368,929 votes.

Of the 200 Grand National Assembly seats allocated to parties according to their overall voting percentage, the breakdown was as follows:

Party Name	Proportional percent	Prop. seats
Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP)	47.15	97
Union of Democratic Forces (UDF)	36.20	75
Bulgarian Agrarian National Union (BANU)	8.03	16
Movement for Rights and Freedoms	6.03	12

Twenty-five other parties shared 2.59 percent of the proportional vote not won by the four main parties.

The UDF constituent parties which will have the greatest representation in the Grand National Assembly (based on the proportional vote) are the "Nikola Petkov" Agrarians, the Bulgarian Social Democratic Party, Ecoglasnost and the Discussion Club.

In the June 10 elections, the BSP won 75 of the 200 "majoritarian" seats, the UDF won 32, BANU did not win any, and the largely ethnic Turkish Rights and Freedoms Movement won 9 seats. Candidates representing the Fatherland Union, the Bulgarian Social Democratic Party (non-Marxist faction), and one independent candidate each won one single-mandate seat.

A total of 81 of the 200 single-mandate ("majoritarian") seats were contested in the June 17 second-round elections. The final election results of the 400 total (single-mandate and multi-mandate) seats were as follows:

Bulgarian Socialist Party	211 (52.7 percent)
Union of Democratic Forces	144 (36 percent)
Movement for Rights and Freedoms	23 (5.75 percent)
Agrarian Union	16 (4 percent)
Others	6

A number of leading government and BSP winners did not receive a majority in the June 10 elections and were forced to compete in the second round. Among the second-round BSP winners were Prime Minister Andrei Lukanov, Supreme Council Secretary Rumen Serbezov and Interior Minister Atanas Semerdzhiev. Among second-round election losers were Defense Minister Dobri Dzhurov, Supreme Council Deputy Chairman Georgi Pirinski, Culture Minister Krastyo Goranov and BSP Speaker Filip Bokov.

UDF candidates fared better in the cities, and won 24 of 26 seats in Sofia. The BSP maintained its stronghold in much of the countryside, reflecting the chasm separating the urban professionals and the more conservative peasants and industrial workers. The Turkish Rights and Freedoms Movement won in Kurdzhali and Razgrad, two regions where ethnic Turks make up a majority of the population.

## V. POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

Although marred by inequities and irregularities, the June elections represent an important step in Bulgaria's transition to democracy. Despite the shortcomings, all the major political parties accepted the results of the election and will serve in the new Grand National Assembly, which is scheduled to convene on July 10. With the presence of independent political forces representing differing and often competing viewpoints (including those of the Turkish minority represented by the Rights and Freedoms Movement), the new parliament can be expected to play a major role in the development of a genuinely democratic, pluralistic society.

To a significant extent, the BSP's narrow victory was due to built-in advantages it had in communicating its message that an opposition win would mean a cut in government subsidies and less security and benefits. This especially appeared to have its effect on the more conservative element of the Bulgarian countryside. Nevertheless, the Socialist election victory by no means eliminates the problems they face, the foremost being tensions between its hardline and reformist wings. Indeed, the possibility of a formal split cannot be excluded. The entrenched vested interests in the provinces, which form the "old guard" of the Communist Party, can be expected to resist change and hamper reforms.

Despite clinching a majority in the elections, the BSP faces a formidable opposition whose base of support lies among the more influential elements of Bulgarian society -- including intellectuals and professionals. The opposition's strategy to turn the election into a referendum on the past four decades of Communist rule and downplay the achievements since the fall of Zhivkov did not result in an electoral majority. Nevertheless, it is clear that they will be a major force to be reckoned with. Their influence especially will be felt on legislation of "constitutional importance" by having the ability to frustrate the two-thirds vote necessary for constitutional measures. But the possibility of splits within the UDF also exists, especially from elements within the independent labor federation Podkrepa, the Committee for Religious Rights and the Independent Students Society, which have been critical of the UDF leadership's "accommodationist" tactics.

The opposition has continued to be vocal and active since the election. On June 11, the day after the first-round elections, and on very short notice, Commission observers witnessed 100,000 UDF supporters stage an impressive rally in Sofia. Thousands of people waving blue UDF flags and chanting anti-BSP slogans, accompanied by cars with horns honking, transversed Sofia well into the night. Militia presence was minimal. Visible opposition activity has continued since, including a student hunger strike at Sofia University and a dozen other universities and institutes demanding the publication of an analysis of election manipulation and more objective news reporting. Indeed, President Petur Mladenov's July 6 departure from office was largely due to opposition demands that he resign because of his December 1989 remarks to Defense Minister Dzhurov about using tanks against demonstrators.

The BSP leadership has called for a coalition government, but leaders of all the opposition parties have so far refused to join in one. UDF spokesman Georgi Spassov has said that the BSP's proposal for such a coalition was an attempt to deprive Bulgaria of a real political opposition. Instead, they appear to be hedging on expressing support for a government composed of experts who would enjoy the consensus support of all major parties and reform the economy.

No matter what its makeup, the new Government will face numerous and difficult challenges to transform Bulgaria into a democratic, pluralistic state with an economy based on market competition.