

### Bulgarian Democracy's Organizational Weapon

*M. Steven Fish and Robin S. Brooks*

One of the most remarkable—and least celebrated and understood—political stories of the postcommunist region is the relative success of democratization in Bulgaria. Not only has democratization taken place but democracy has taken hold. Bulgaria has avoided the slide toward authoritarianism that occurred in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Albania, Armenia, and all the countries of Central Asia in the second half of the 1990s. Explaining Bulgaria's experience is difficult. Most of the usual explanations for success do not work. Bulgaria does not have a hardy democratic tradition. The brand of Sovietism practiced in Bulgaria was similar to that found in the USSR. Dissent was dealt with harshly. In contrast with Hungary or Poland, no substantial political or economic liberalization occurred during the 1970s or 1980s. At the onset of the regime change, Bulgaria was poor even by regional standards, and the economic trauma it endured during the early years of transition was as severe as that experienced by Russia and Ukraine. Neighborhood effects cannot be considered particularly auspicious. Bulgaria shares a long border with Serbia, and Sofia is located close to that border. To its south, Bulgaria is bounded by Greece and Turkey; it is the only country to share a border with both. Bulgaria does not border a West or Central European country. Nor does it have an ethnically homogeneous population. It has a large Turkish minority, geographically concentrated in the south, as well as substantial populations of Roma and Pomaks. The precommunist history of relations between Bulgarians and Turks was bloodier than that between Serbs and the people now called Bosnian

Muslims, and relations between the two groups in Bulgaria were much worse during the Soviet era than those between the two groups in Yugoslavia. In short, Bulgaria did not enter the postcommunist era as a leading candidate for robust democratization. Yet democracy came nonetheless, and it appears to be holding, perhaps even deepening.

After the beginning of the regime change at the end of the 1980s, Bulgaria did develop one noteworthy asset: an array of reasonably strong political parties. Like Romania and Mongolia, arguably the postcommunist region's two other pleasant surprises in the realm of democratization, Bulgaria has had a relatively high rate of popular participation in parties. Seven percent of voting-age Bulgarians, 12 percent of Romanians, and 20 percent of Mongolians belong to parties. The numbers are all high by postcommunist standards and are far greater than in Russia and Ukraine, where rates of party membership are one or two percent (Marc Howard, *Demobilized Societies: Understanding the Weakness of Civil Society in Post-Communist Europe* [Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1999]; M. Steven Fish, "Mongolia: Democracy without Prerequisites," *Journal of Democracy* 9, no. 3 [July 1998]). In Bulgaria, as in Romania and Mongolia, the communist-successor party or parties account for a substantial proportion of overall party membership, but major liberal or otherwise noncommunist-successor parties emerged as well. It is difficult to locate anything other than political parties to account for the Bulgarian (or for that matter, Romanian and Mongolian) advantage in democratization.

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In Bulgaria, the most impressive party to emerge since the dawn of open politics is the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF). It is not only the strongest party in Bulgaria; it is arguably the mightiest right-center party in postcommunist Europe. Only Vaclav Klaus's Civic Democratic Party even compares to the UDF in terms of membership magnitude, organizational coherence, and depth of rootedness in society.

### **Where the UDF came from**

The UDF started life as a *mélange* of over a dozen diminutive groups that coalesced loosely during the early phase of the regime change. It lost the first parliamentary elections to the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), the main communist-successor party. It fared better in the 1991 elections and from November 1991 until September 1992 enjoyed a brief stint as the leading party in government. It also did well in races for local offices, especially in urban areas. It subsequently underwent hard times. It lost control of the government to the BSP in the fall of 1992 and was drubbed by them at the polls in 1994, locking it out of government for nearly a half decade. In local elections in 1995 it suffered setbacks as well. During the early 1990s, the UDF was the major liberal force in Bulgaria, but it did not succeed in either holding power or building a sturdy organization.

This situation began to shift during the summer of 1995. The leading force for change was Ivan Kostov, an economist who had served as minister of finance in the short-lived UDF government. Kostov intended to create a centralized, disciplined mass-membership political party out of the band of bantam groups that constituted the UDF. This involved inducing these groups to submerge their identities in a larger, hierarchical organization that identified itself as a right-center political party rather than as a "democratic movement." While building a party apparatus and identity, Kostov and his allies also inserted their organization deeply into society. They founded party clubs around the country to boost popular participation. They opened UDF cafés for young people, sports facilities for children, and reading rooms for older folks. They forged close contacts with nonstate associations, including journalists' groups, human-rights organizations, and other groups that

identified with the UDF's essentially liberal agenda. The fruits of these efforts showed in November 1996, when Petar Stoyanov, the UDF candidate and former deputy minister of justice during the UDF's brief spell in power early in the decade, soundly defeated his BSP rival in presidential elections. The presidency, the powers of which are strictly limited in Bulgaria's parliamentary regime, had previously been occupied by Zhelyu Zhelev, the courageous former dissident who had enjoyed UDF's support. After over a year and a half of organization building, UDF finally held its founding conference as a political party in February 1997. Kostov was elected chairman.

The party's inaugural conference took place just a week after the BSP government, under the pressure of mass demonstrations, agreed to hold early parliamentary elections. The UDF did not organize or initiate the torrent of civil unrest that swept Bulgaria in early 1997. The demonstrations occurred in response to economic disaster as well as the corruption and ineptitude of the BSP government and were largely spontaneous. But the UDF reacted quickly and established some mastery over the unrest. The party's parliamentary leaders successfully forged a coalition of all parliamentary factions opposed to the BSP. In addition, UDF activists mobilized crowds, displaying sympathy with the demonstrators and amplifying their demands. Party leaders also restrained the mobs, successfully persuading a huge crowd not to invade the parliament building in order to attack the hapless Socialist politicians holed up inside. Thus the UDF helped convert mass discontent into political power. In late April, in alliance with several tiny parties, the UDF captured 52 percent of the popular vote and 57 percent of the seats in parliamentary elections. The Socialists and their partners, the Ecoglasnost movement, finished with 22 percent of the vote and 24 percent of seats. The election ended an era of stultifying, sclerotic Socialist rule and established the UDF as Bulgaria's dominant political force and one of the most dynamic parties in postcommunist Europe.

### **How the UDF did it**

Other right-center parties in the postcommunist region have managed to win elections, but few have ever established the rootedness in society and

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political dominance that the UDF did in Bulgaria. How has the party done it? More specifically, how can one account for the rise of so formidable a right-center party in Bulgaria?

As with the emergence of democracy in general, the UDF's emergence is not readily accounted for by the standard explanations or expectations. The UDF is not a historical party. Unlike Slovakia's liberal Democratic Party and nationalist Slovak National Party (SNP), Bulgaria's UDF cannot claim precommunist lineage. It cannot draw on a ready-made name, symbols, or other sources of identification. Unlike Hungary's liberal Alliance of Free Democrats and Federation of Young Democrats, the UDF does not enjoy roots in a communist-era informal dissident movement. Nor has the UDF, in contrast with Poland's Solidarity and Hungary's conservative Hungarian Democratic Forum (HDF), ever enjoyed a popular confessional basis and the advantages of close association with a church. As a center-right organization committed to capitalism, participation in European institutions, and the protection of human rights, the UDF may be considered a "bourgeois" party. Indeed, as one would expect, it draws support from more-urban, younger, and better-educated citizens, while the BSP's base is more rural, older, and less well educated. In cross-national terms, however, the UDF's relative strength remains enigmatic. The UDF has thrived in a society with one of the most-diminutive and least-developed middle classes in postcommunist Europe and with a per capita GDP that is the same as Guatemala's and substantially smaller than that of Russia, Belarus, Croatia, or Poland.

The UDF's success derives from three factors. The first is institutional, and the fact that Bulgaria has a parliamentary regime in which seats in the legislature are allotted by party lists according to proportional representation (PR) is of central importance. Most (but not all) of the countries of the postcommunist world with reasonably substantial political parties assign parliamentary seats completely or largely in terms of PR. All countries with substantial parties have legislatures that enjoy meaningful authority. Some, such as Bulgaria and Hungary, have parliamentary systems; others, such as

Poland and Mongolia, have semipresidential regimes; still others, such as Moldova and Lithuania, have moderate presidential systems. All systems that adopted "superpresidential" constitutions—those that invest modest capacity in the legislature and give overwhelming powers to the president, such as Russia, Kyrgyzstan, and Armenia—subsequently failed to develop strong party systems.

Institutional stimuli are important, but they clearly are also present in many other postcommunist polities whose party systems do not include a right-center organization as formidable as the UDF. The UDF's prosperity is due largely to two other phenomena. The first is the character and trajectory of political competition since the beginning of the regime change. Specifically, it is found in the UDF's loss in the initial elections and exclusion from power for most of the 1990s, *combined* with the maintenance of enough political openness within the country to allow for a vigorous opposition. In the countries where noncommunist forces won the initial elections, they subsequently faced two disadvantages from the standpoint of party development. First, they were blamed by electorates for the trials of the transition. This led to these forces' losses in second-generation elections in many countries, including Lithuania, Poland, and Hungary. The victory of noncommunist forces in the first elections was, however, usually sufficient to ensure the renovation (or "democratization") of the communist-successor parties, as happened in all three of the countries just mentioned. Thus, when they returned to power in either parliamentary or presidential elections (or both), as happened in these countries (from 1992 through 1995) the former communists were indeed truly "former." The early whipping convinced them of the need for total reformation and cured them of whatever residual delusions of achieving a monopoly on power they still might have harbored. The noncommunist (usually liberal) parties that had won the first elections and lost the second ones were allowed, therefore, to continue competing and were not suppressed after they lost. But these same parties were still associated in the popular imagination with all the blunders and hardships of the early phase of transition. They were, as a result, not particularly good

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candidates, as the 1990s wore on, for exploiting mass public discontent and rallying opposition to evils such as corruption, economic mismanagement, and steeply rising income differentials.

What is more, their early experience in power in many cases spoiled liberal parties as organizations. In his fine study, Angelo Panebianco argues that one should expect “parties that gain national power immediately after their formation—thus undergoing organizational consolidation while in power—to become weak institutions.” Parties that form while “in power” have at their disposal “a multiplicity of public resources in political competition, and these resources are often an efficient substitute for supporter mobilization” (*Political Parties: Organization and Power* [Cambridge University Press, 1988], p. 69).

One indeed sees this dynamic at work in postcommunist polities. It was starkly evident in Russia in the early and mid-1990s, when each of the two successive “parties of power” under the Yeltsin administration, Democratic Choice of Russia and Our Home is Russia, failed to undertake serious organization building and were subsequently decimated in elections and wiped off the political map. Hungary’s initially mighty HDF suffered a similar fate, and, in part, for the same reasons.

Liberal parties that did not win their country’s initial elections, by contrast, neither bore the brunt of blame for the traumas of the early phase of transition nor grew fat and lazy on state largesse. In places where the initial electoral victory of forces associated with the old order led to a continuation of closed politics and the repression of opposition, noncommunist opposition parties naturally stood little if any chance of flourishing. Serbia and Uzbekistan both illustrate this phenomenon. But where politics remained competitive the conditions for the development of liberal parties proved auspicious. Such a situation obtained in Bulgaria, Romania, and Mongolia. In Bulgaria, as in Romania, the vigor of anticommunist forces in the early years of the regime change, despite their defeat in national elections, itself helped keep politics open. This state of affairs was particularly pronounced in Bulgaria, where the liberals, with Zhelyu Zhelev, did win the presidency during the transition—a significant show of strength despite the

office’s lack of power. The UDF’s reasonably strong showing in parliamentary elections in 1991 also revealed the breadth of the noncommunists’ popular support and showed the BSP that the costs of repression would be high. As the legal secretary of Bulgaria’s Helsinki Watch Committee remarked in early 1998, “The two major political blocs, the Socialists and the liberals, have been fairly well balanced from the beginning. Neither has ever really been strong enough to crack down on the other side” (interview by M. Steven Fish with Yonko Grozev, January 2, 1998, Sofia).

Indeed, Bulgarian politics in the 1990s, in some respects, resembled the deadlocked “hot family feud” that Dankwart Rustow, in his highly influential article on the theory of democracy’s genesis, posited as a necessary first step in successful democratization (“Transitions to Democracy: Toward a Dynamic Model,” *Comparative Politics* 2, no. 3 [April 1970]). In Romania and Mongolia, the situation was less obviously Rustowian in the initial years, since the ascendancy of the custodians of the old regime was more pronounced. But in these countries, too, the postcommunists in power were unwilling or unable to quash their opponents.

In all three countries, these circumstances conduced to the development of liberal parties. The UDF emerged as described above. In Romania, the dominance of the presidency and the parliament by forces closely associated with the old order helped stimulate the rise of the Democratic Convention (DC) of Romania, led by the Christian Democratic–National Peasant’s Party and the National Liberal Party. These parties’ efforts bore fruit in November 1996, when the DC’s presidential candidate, Emil Constantinescu, defeated the incumbent, Ion Iliescu, and the DC won a plurality in parliamentary elections. In Mongolia, the opponents of the postcommunist Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party (MPRP) were eclipsed in the early and mid-1990s and spent their time organizing two strong liberal parties, the Mongolian National Democratic Party and the Mongolian Social Democratic Party. These two parties came together in the Democratic Coalition and in 1996 stunned the country and outside observers by capturing over two-thirds of the

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seats in parliamentary elections and throwing the MPRP out of power.

The parallels between Mongolia and Bulgaria are particularly striking. In both countries liberal politicians responded to humiliating defeats in early elections by sternly dedicating themselves to the unglamorous grind of party building. In Mongolia, as in Bulgaria, this process involved getting out of the capital city and organizing support in provinces, taking the message directly to the people, and creating organizational structures that did not eschew hierarchy, discipline, or the label and ethos of “party.”

These efforts required and depended on the quality of party leadership. This pesky, unpredictable factor is the third component of the explanation for the UDF’s success. The UDF had within its ranks several capable organizers who judged party building to be the path to personal power and national progress. One was Stefan Sofijanski, currently the mayor of Sofia. Others included President Petar Stoyanov, who began his political career in the early 1990s as a UDF activist in Plovdiv, and Asen Agov, the suave but blunt-spoken journalist who chairs parliament’s foreign affairs committee. Kostov, however, was the father of the party. He did not found it, but it was he who forged a genuine party out of a motley coalition of quarrelsome groups. His part in building the UDF was not entirely dissimilar to Helmut Kohl’s role in converting the German Christian Democratic Union (CDU) from a clubby association of notables into a mass membership party and an electoral powerhouse in the 1970s and early 1980s.

In contrast with Kohl, however, Kostov is not a jocular, amiable figure. By temperament he more closely resembles Vaclav Klaus. He shares Klaus’s irascibility and organizational acumen, as well as the Czech leader’s inability, sometimes, to prevent the former from undermining the benefits of the latter. Like Klaus and the leaders of Mongolia’s Democratic Coalition, but in stark contrast with Russian liberals such as Grigory Yavlinsky, Yegor Gaidar, and Anatoly Chubais, Kostov did not regard painstaking organization building in every nook and corner of the country as beneath his dignity. Nor did early electoral defeats produce in him lasting contempt for the average unwashed voter, as was the case with the

above-named Russian leaders. His approach to organization building showed that he regards such specimens as potential foot soldiers in—or at least supporters of—his own party, not as unlettered and intrinsically illiberal hazards to his own political fortunes and his country’s advancement to democracy and the market.

### **What the UDF has done**

As it took over government in the spring of 1997, the UDF inherited an economy in collapse. Under its Socialist governments, Bulgaria was the very *beau idéal* of gradualism. After an initial round of rapid price liberalization, the BSP slowly reintroduced price controls. The proportion of products subject to these controls crept up from 16 percent in 1992 to over 40 percent in 1995. Privatization was carried out with great deliberation, and nurturing the public sector took precedence over both privatization and facilitating new private business entries. The result was the complete interpenetration of the political class and the owners and managers of enterprises. By mid-decade, the roughly 700 sizable enterprises in Bulgaria had corrupted the political elite completely. Influence flowed both ways, since politicians, especially given the dearth of other inducements, offered their supporters directorships and other management positions in the big enterprises.

By 1995, the government often did not even try to conceal the extent of corruption. One deputy prime minister sat on the boards of six major enterprises and collected handsome sums for his invaluable services. This behavior became entirely normal, even as public outrage mounted. By 1996, tax-collection capacity had virtually evaporated, with tax revenues falling to about 8 percent of GDP; both foreign and domestic investment fell from sluggish to virtually nonexistent; and a new round of hyperinflation engulfed the economy. With the economy in a tailspin and enterprise managers and government officials in a mad scramble to make off with every asset they could lay hands on, the mass demonstrations mentioned above gathered steam, leading to the elections that swept the UDF to power.

Once in office as prime minister, Kostov quickly eliminated price controls, invited the IMF

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to establish a currency board, and launched a crash privatization program. The UDF's formidable discipline in parliament ensured the enactment of these reforms and thwarted three BSP-initiated votes of no confidence, with the most recent in June 2000. Hyperinflation was stamped out quickly. Foreign direct investment rose to nearly three-quarters of a billion dollars in 1999, three times the level of 1996. By the end of 1999, over 70 percent of all state property subject to privatization had been sold off, with the rate of privatization in 1999 outstripping all previous years. The financial system, which was virtually destroyed in the crash of 1996 and the austerity program introduced in 1997, began a slow resurrection in 1998. Sweeping banking reforms helped clear the way for the nascence of a system of private banking. In 2000, the economy will grow by about 4 percent, an unspectacular figure but one that is respectable from a regional perspective and that helps make the disaster of 1996–97 seem like a distant nightmare.

The UDF could not have accomplished such reforms by means of economic policy alone. Corruption and organized crime of Russian proportions (and often with the participation of Russia-based criminal organizations), as well as bad economic policy, choked the Bulgarian economy during the era of BSP rule. The UDF came to power full of bluster about its intentions to transform this situation. Kostov regularly invoked the language of war to describe his posture toward crime and corruption. Agov told one of the authors of this paper in early 1998 that “organized crime will be smashed in Bulgaria” (Fish interview with Asen Agov, January 13, 1998, Sofia).

Remarkably, Agov's prediction proved prescient. In late 1997 and early 1998, the UDF government launched a multifaceted and authentic anticorruption campaign. In a clever stratagem intended to decriminalize the economy's commanding heights, the government raised the initial capitalization requirements to start an insurance company by over 10 times. Since illegitimate business conglomerates in Bulgaria relied on insurance companies for cover (much the way their counterparts in Russia have relied upon banks), the move yanked the roofs off of a host of criminal syndicates. The Ministry of Interior was

purged, with officials known to be corrupt, and particularly those involved in the insurance business, dismissed en masse.

In a remarkable reassertion of state power, the then-minister of the interior, Bogomil Bonev, called the leaders of the main criminal syndicates into his offices for personal consultations. In discussions with each, he essentially offered the option of moving into legitimate operations and submitting to the law or facing bankruptcy and other even more unpleasant consequences. The government sacked the BSP-appointed managers of most public enterprises and replaced them with new personnel. To attack smuggling, which had spun out of control by 1997, the government transferred border control from the Interior Ministry and the state-security services to the army and reorganized and retrained army units responsible for border patrol. The refurbished Interior Ministry cracked down on car-theft rings, which had come to constitute one of the biggest sectors of the economy. At the beginning of 2000, in a fresh effort to boost tax collection, a new law took effect that requires all street vendors and taxi drivers to provide customers with receipts and to work only with cash registers with “fiscal memory.”

As of mid-2000, most of the criminal syndicates that had dominated the economy and that, in alliance with corrupt officials, had engaged in wild rent-seeking, have either gone out of business or transformed themselves into legitimate operations. Few of the old nefarious behemoths have continued to evade the law with impunity. The insurance companies have either gone out of business or become legitimate companies. The government requires them to maintain reasonably high levels of capital on hand and regulates them in a manner that ensures that they pay their clients' claims as prescribed by law. Tax revenues have risen steeply. Street crime has declined. Thugs restrained only by the formidable weight of their gold necklaces no longer lord it over city streets as they did in the early and mid-1990s.

Corruption has by no means disappeared. Cronyism and favoritism in competition for government contracts, patronage-based job distribution, and tax evasion remain severe. Nevertheless, these are the types of pathologies that corrupt political

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and economic life even in the West. Prior to 1997, with organized crime in control of the economy and with virtually the entire government locked in a bear hug with rent-seeking monopolists, bribe taking and tax evasion hardly even registered as infractions.

Attacking organized crime and official corruption has helped establish some rudiments of the rule of law. This achievement has been the UDF's greatest contribution to democratization. The UDF came to power in a deeply troubled but nevertheless open polity. To their credit, the previous Socialist governments did not pursue a Serbian- or Uzbek-style strategy of maintaining a monopoly by force and fraud, and the UDF took over a country that had already undergone substantial democratization. But the BSP governments hardly established norms of operation befitting a democracy. They habitually violated their own laws and sometimes dealt coercively with the press and with public demonstrations. The UDF has preserved the gains of the past while bolstering state autonomy and laying the groundwork—however wobbly—for a law-based regime.

Finally, the UDF has completely reoriented Bulgaria's foreign policy. The BSP, while professing support for closer ties with the West, did not pursue them vigorously and clearly tilted toward Russia. The UDF is unequivocally pro-Western and maintains close contacts with several major center-right Western parties, such as Germany's CDU and Greece's New Democracy. Kostov rarely mentions either his country or his party without modifying the name of each with the adjective "European." In his public statements he often refers to "Europe" more frequently than to "Bulgaria." And he constantly chides the BSP for, in his view, failing to "orient itself toward European values" (*Trud* [Sofia], May 6, 2000). The UDF's effusive Euromania may grate on many Bulgarians, but it does exhibit the party's liberal, right-center character and distinguish it clearly from right-nationalist parties such as SNP, the Romanian National Unity Party, and Hungary's Independent Smallholders' Party.

### **Hazards and prospects**

One might expect that reforming the economy, reducing crime and corruption, advancing democratization, and pulling the country closer to the West

would yield handsome political dividends and guarantee the UDF's continuation in power. But public-opinion polls taken in mid-2000 show that the UDF is no longer more popular than the BSP. In the October 1999 local elections, the UDF performed below expectations. Kostov's previously high approval ratings have slipped. The possibility of a UDF defeat in the next parliamentary elections cannot be excluded. The decline in support for the UDF may be due in part to the common phenomenon of growing public weariness as years pass with the same old government and faces in power. But the UDF's popularity deficit is rooted in real problems as well.

First, despite the success of the UDF's macroeconomic stabilization policy and the return of respectable growth rates, unemployment is stuck at nearly 20 percent, roughly the same level as in Poland and Slovakia. Second, while organized crime has been suppressed and official corruption reduced, public standards for what constitutes openness and fair play have risen steeply, and the UDF government's behavior often falls short. The UDF has not engaged in the brazen, massive theft that the BSP did when in power, but it has frequently been accused of sacrificing economic optimality to political expediency in the privatization program. The UDF has greatly accelerated privatization, but deals often lack transparency and many have taken the form of management-employee buyouts (MEBOs).

MEBOs are economically problematic since they do not bring in new capital, expertise, or access to new markets. They are politically suspect since the winners are often the beneficiaries of the "blue purge" of the old "red directors" that the UDF undertook after coming to power. In 1999, MEBOs accounted for about one-third of all privatization deals. The government claims that MEBOs are necessary to accelerate state divestment of assets. The rise of a UDF-friendly "blue elite" within the business class nevertheless smacks of clientelism. A number of corruption scandals, as well as a recent personnel shake-up and a suicide at the Interior Ministry, have further tarnished the UDF's reputation for probity. Inevitably, some scandals have a decidedly political flavor and seem to reflect intraparty rancor. In December 1999, Kostov dismissed Alexander

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Bozhkov and Evgenii Bakardjiev from ministerships on grounds of corruption. Both Bozhkov and Bakardjiev were also forced to relinquish their high-ranking positions within the UDF party hierarchy.

To some extent, the UDF also suffers from public wariness prompted by the party's own success. The UDF controls all state agencies on the national level. It has been sufficiently disciplined to thwart three no-confidence votes and to realize most of the goals that it set for itself in 1997. The UDF has forged a political system in which elections actually create power. Elections have not done so in many other post-communist countries. The debility of political parties in many other places means that the electors' preferences are not aggregated; the elected cannot be held accountable to an identifiable program; no powerful political organization monitors politicians' behavior in order to guard its own reputation; and sections of the political elite relate to one another exclusively on the basis of mutual personal interest or interpersonal antagonism. Consequently, "government" has a completely different meaning in Bulgaria than it does, say, in Russia. Bulgaria has a government. A party or coalition of parties controls the state apparatus. Russia does not really have a government. Instead, it has a state apparatus that attempts—and fails—to govern. That apparatus includes but a single elected official—the president—and operates on the basis of innumerable bilateral personal links between the president and his subordinates. By contrast, real governments, whether European-style parliamentary governments or American-style "administrations," are always teams; that is part of what makes them governments. Governments in post-Soviet Russia, unlike in Bulgaria, have never functioned as teams, since teams require not only a captain and subordinates but also a system of stable roles and players who wear jerseys that bear the same identifying color and insignia.

But the very strength and extent of control of the UDF government raises the specter of partyocracy that many citizens in postcommunist countries, including Bulgaria, abhor. Kostov's personal predominance, both as prime minister and as party leader, only feeds unease. For a strong party to provide the means for elections to create power may be crucial to the country's political development, but Bulgarian political

discourse reveals a growing public wariness concerning overconcentration of power. The perception is only exacerbated by a recent proposal coming from the UDF to raise the threshold for representation in parliament from the current 4 percent barrier to 6 percent. Doing so would endanger the representation of the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF), the main party of the Turkish minority. Given the crucial role of the MRF in integrating Turks into mainstream political life, such a change in the electoral system could endanger the remarkable interethnic peace that has prevailed in postcommunist Bulgaria. The proposal is a transparent and arrogant threat aimed at the MRF, whose relations with the UDF have gone from warm to strained during the past several years.

On balance, however, the UDF's might has facilitated political development in Bulgaria rather than retarded it. The UDF controls the levers of power, but it operates in a highly pluralistic system that it has itself helped to create. It must face the threat of elections. Unlike in Russia and Ukraine, there is scant reason for oppositionists to fear fraud in future elections. Information flows freely. In the most recent Press Freedom Survey conducted by Freedom House, Bulgaria received the same score as Hungary and Greece and rated much higher than Romania, Turkey, and Macedonia (Press Freedom Survey 2000 at [www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org)). A private national television station is already broadcasting in the country, several local private stations operate freely, cable and satellite television are widely available, and harassment of journalists is rare.

Kostov has achieved an impressive mastery of his organization, but the UDF is in no respects a charismatic party; its identity does not depend on Kostov. Like Italy's Christian Democratic Party after Alcide De Gasperi and Communist Party after Palmiro Togliatti, the UDF is capable of surviving its leader's defeat or passing. In fact, like these Italian party leaders and their organizations, Kostov and the UDF are now shaping, perhaps inadvertently, a type of polity common in Europe during the first four postwar decades but unusual in the postcommunist world and in present-day Western Europe: a pluralistic partyocracy. The characteristic feature that dominant political organizations in such polities seem to share is that they are



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solidly rooted in society. Remarkably, at present all major political parties are deeply rooted in society. The UDF's formidable organization, when combined with the staying power and enduring unity of the BSP and the loyalty of the MRF's followers and activists, is giving rise to a polity in which parties—rather than spellbinding leaders, the state apparatus, independent local strongmen, the military, or private oligarchs—are the central actors in political life. As the Italian experience demonstrates, pluralistic partyocracy can engender clientelism, dysfunctional politicization of parts of the private sector, and political sclerosis. The Italian expe-

rience also shows that pluralistic partyocracy can spur consolidation of democracy and progress toward prosperity in a poor, peripheral, and demoralized land.

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*M. Steven Fish is an associate professor of political science at the University of California, Berkeley. He is the author of Democracy from Scratch: Opposition and Regime in the New Russian Revolution (Princeton University Press, 1995). Robin S. Brooks is a Ph.D. candidate in the department of political science at the University of California, Berkeley. She is writing her dissertation on ethnic self-identification and nation building in postcommunist Europe.*