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Opinion Print



Prof. Petar-Emil Mitev: Mudslinging wars are part of every election campaign in Bulgaria

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Prof. Petar-Emil Mitev comments for FOCUS News Agency on the electioneering situation, the expected number of voters according to the latest polls and other issues

FOCUS: What is the electoral picture before the pending EP election according to the latest polls?

Petar-Emil Mitev: The picture varies in accordance with the basic variable – the voter turnout. In case of extremely low voter turnout (under 25%) MRF might be the top political party in the election; in case of moderately low turnout (25-34%) BSP may rank top; upon 35-40% the difference between BSP and CEDB will be little or CEDB will be one seat ahead. If voter turnout tops 40% CEDB might be two seats ahead of BSP. By now it is likely that around 2,300,000 will cast their ballot, which accounts for 35-38% voter turnout. It seems that following the latest scandal with Ataka at Okolchitsa the party has lost its chances to compete with MRF for the third place. The Blue Coalition is in the threshold margin and will most probably win a seat in the EP. In case of too low turnout it might win two seats. NMSP too is around the threshold 0 between 4% and 6%. OJL too has its chances but the support for Yanev has stopped ebbing. The rest of the parties have no chance.

FOCUS: You have said the election campaign is provincial. How about smaller local political parties that are traditionally underestimated?

Petar-Emil Mitev: It is not the Bulgarian province I mean but Bulgaria as a European province. Imagine that small political parties in Silstra for example experience the national election as a situation to be involved in entirely local issues. Similar is the tragicomic illusion with Bulgarian voters submerged in political intrigues. Actual issues of European scale are not tabled at all. This is a deep and I dare say unnatural provincialism since we have some EU experience already.

FOCUS: Which is the party that might produce any surprise eth the pending election?

Petar-Emil Mitev: The NMSP is such a party due to its European platform, European style and European ticket. The party has not engaged in mudslinging so far. It is allergic to negativism. It is leading a positive and successful campaign. I expect that the sound mind of Bulgarian voters will be sufficient to single out Meglena Kuneva as the nominee with best proven merits.

FOCUS: So what's left for the EP election in all that mudslinging?

Petar-Emil Mitev: Not much. Mudslinging wars are part of every election campaign in Bulgaria and not just in Bulgaria. Electioneering for the EP is marked by disclosures about Premier Berlusconi's private life. In Bulgaria however mudslinging goes too far. The actual political debate is scarce. Personal disputes push politics in the background and technical problems become political. Our MEPs will be part of crucial decisions for the future of the European Union. Here we're busy discussing people visiting police parties. Even in terms of mudslinging we fail to reach the European issues. Our current MEPs are virtually unaffected except fore blocked EU funds. The adoption of funds is more of an exclusion and is usually interpreted on the level of administrative and political fraud and not in the relations between Sofia and Brussels.

FOCUS: What percentage of voters tend to sell their votes?

Petar-Emil Mitev: It is hard to define a constant percentage. At the start of the transition period the country was shattered by political emotions. Vote trading has mostly occurred over the last years. The phenomenon may reach 10% of actual voters according to expert data. However exact data is not available. I would add that "political money" may be playing a bigger role in other ways. For example by buying of media.

FOCUS: What is the sociological profile of people selling votes?

Petar-Emil Mitev: Roma people of various age. Poor, marginalized people. Unemployed. Some of them are young people. The primary crime scene however are Roma ghettos.

FOCUS: What are the regions where purchased votes are expected to swing election results?

Petar-Emil Mitev: Alerts for future vote buying have been worryingly numerous. The book "The Price of Elections or How Parties Buy Power" by Assoc. Prof. Georgi Manolov is just out. There vote buying techniques are described with extreme precision. But the book is getting obsolete as new techniques are being invented. The author might be writing a revised edition. At the last elections the regions that gained notoriety for vote buying were Pernik, Varna, Stara Zagora, Berkovitsa... Now most of the signals are coming from Sliven and Vidin. But I'd like to ask back: where is investigating journalism? Preventing vote buying is not merely a problem of the Police and the Prosecutor's Office. It is an issue of the public.

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