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## Macro: Anger

Fri, Jun 12 2009 10:00 CET | by [Alex Bivol](#) | 134 Views



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Photo: Tsvetelina Angelova

Prime Minister Sergei Stanishev has taken condescension to an art form. During his latest campaign appearance, cunningly hidden in plain sight as the news conference in the aftermath of the European Parliament elections, the tone of his drawn-out speech bore a remarkable resemblance to that a headmaster would use in imparting wisdom to wide-eyed first-graders.

To describe the tone of Stanishev's media appearances throughout his four-year term as arrogant would only scratch the surface. At one point during his news conference, I had a brief and irrational urge to follow the example of the Iraqi journalist that chucked his shoes at George W Bush.

The anger quickly subsided, replaced by curiosity whether Stanishev himself believes any word of what he is peddling as fact? Mistakes are mentioned but quickly glossed over, but it is the debacles with European Union funding and the frequent criticism from the European Commission, the endless conflicts of interest and the judiciary's inability to deal with high-profile corruption cases that for many Bulgarians will remain the hallmarks of this Socialist-led government.

I know that it is no representative sample, but the palpable anger on the comments pages of Bulgarian newspapers and the occasional mass protest in front of Parliament leave no doubt how disgruntled a large swathe of Bulgaria's society is with Stanishev and his Socialists. Dismissing the discontent as the result of partisan rhetoric, Stanishev has done little to address its root causes.

And why would he have to? For as long as he can keep the interest groups within his Socialist party happy, Stanishev will remain the leader of a party that is guaranteed to get about a million votes in the July parliamentary elections. He knows that a lot of talk and a little money will keep the Socialist key demographic – the pensioners – voting for the party, so he does not need to woo the majority of the country's voters.

Some conspiracy theorists have already started speculating that Stanishev would be content with losing the elections as long as the Socialists win enough votes to make a future ruling coalition too unstable without Socialist support. That coalition would then have the unenviable task of balancing the books on the Budget and making unpopular decisions, which the Socialists have avoided despite increasingly clear signs that Bulgaria was headed for a recession that its economy was woefully underprepared to deal with.

Far-fetched as the political manoeuvring may sound, it is hard to argue against the thesis that the driving force of Bulgarian politics for the past two decades has been public anger, usually against whoever is in government.

But as long as public anger remains the sole agent of change in Bulgarian politics, the task of winning elections will be reduced to simply directing that anger and that does not bode well for Bulgarian democracy.

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