



INSTITUTE FOR REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

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Have protests ceased to be a threat to human security in Bulgaria?

In the alternating showers and heat of mid-June, Bulgaria has been shaken by mass peaceful [protests](#) against the freshly formed government. The thin, and a bit absurd, parliamentary majority, de facto formed by the Socialists (BSP), the ethnic Turkish-dominated party (DPS) and the nationalist-populist Ataka party, instigated the popular action by an appointment they made on 14 June characterised by informed observers and people alike as flagrant, insolent and stupid. Parliament elected as head of the State Agency for National Security, DANS, one Delyan Peevski, a media mogul, public figure widely known to be connected with oligarchic and mafia circles in Bulgaria, a person with connections in the judiciary and a current MP from DPS. This caused a spontaneous outpour of people in the evening of that day in front of the Council of Ministers building who [organised](#) themselves via a Facebook event, “No to the appointment of D. Peevski as Head of DANS!” More than 10,000 joined this first protest, and between 10,000 and 20,000 have been protesting [every day](#) since 14 June on the original venue and marching along the streets of Sofia via an already established route.



Protesters gathered spontaneously in front of the Council of Ministers building in Sofia on 14 June. *Photo by Stefan Ralchev*



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The June protests come exactly four months after bloodied, mass [protests](#) against high electricity bills and political corruption brought down the previous government on 20 February. The resulting early parliamentary election on 12 May was supposed to bring more openness in the political process, stability and effective action against the monopolies operating the economy. The Peevski appointment, obviously, proved nothing of the sort was happening. But in terms of human security, the June protests seem to be a marked step forward. While in February there were injured protesters and policemen, disorder and other forms of violence, in June we are witnessing smiling people, often with their kids, who honestly and peacefully state their civic point, dance and sing as a form of protest, respect the policemen guarding them and even [present](#) them with water and flowers. Not a single injury was registered for the first four days of the civic action, until eight were slightly [harmd](#) when provocateurs paid by one of the parties supporting the government, Ataka, entered a confrontation with the peacefully protesting. Statements of tolerance and respect have been coming in the media from both protesters and police.

Of course it is early and unwise to take for granted the non-violent character of Bulgaria's June mass action. The government and the parties supporting it continue to blatantly close their eyes to the demands of the protesters – resignation of Prime Minister Plamen Oresharski and another early election. The demands are justified because, after all, the people are the sovereign in a democracy: if the trust in government and state institutions was so massively demolished by a single appointment, then there is a problem. And if protests are going on, and more and more people are joining them, then the legitimacy of those in power is indefinitely lost and they should leave. But BSP, DPS and Ataka are not hearing the message. They are even continuing with their absurd appointments and statements: Kristian Vigenin, the foreign minister, [named](#) an ex-Communist State Security spy as chief secretary of his ministry, to be responsible for all diplomatic posts; a former mafia-linked person, Ivan Ivanov, was [appointed](#) as deputy interior minister and, only after the media discovered his background, was relieved of his duty (after only three hours in office); and the leader of nationalist-populist Ataka party, Volen Siderov, who [sabotaged](#) a meeting of the national security council at the President's Office and keeps provoking confrontation with the protesters day after day, was [elected](#) head of the parliamentary committee on ethics and anti-corruption. On top of all that, a Socialist MP, Hristo Monov, in a TV show [called](#) protesters 'internet ragamuffins', enraging the public even more. This insolence or inadequacy of the incumbents will not serve to calm down the people and may lead to violence, should the government decides not to step down any time soon. Indeed Tzvetlin Yovchev, the interior minister, [warned](#) that aggression at the political level may be transferred down to the streets.

The real risk of violence, and threat for human security, in the protests consist in the lines of action which undemocratic parties or agents of shady interests might take in order to discredit the protests and render the democratic expression of the people useless. These include the Ataka party, as well as representatives of the so-called oligarchy (monopolies controlling the economy and indirectly the state also associated with organised crime structures), which have a stake in this weak government to remain in power so that their interests are served. With the help of paid provocateurs, these actors are fully capable of inciting violence and unrest, as has been the case in all mass protests in Bulgaria as of late. The good news is that protesters have gradually learnt (with the help of information exchange and issue of warnings over the social networks) to identify provocateurs and isolate them in a very expedient manner.



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