

**IRI REPORT ON  
BULGARIAN PRIMARY ELECTION**  
*June 1, 1996*

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**Some of the statements being made in the press by those involved in and affected by the IRI-sponsored primary process:**

**Peter Stoyanov**, joint opposition presidential candidate: *"The victory goes above all to the Bulgarian democratic community, to Bulgarian democracy. ...The very fact the opposition powers have accepted the primary formula indicates that they have suppressed their old doubts and distrust and have reached the stage of conscious political maturity. ...The high turnout demonstrates the degree to which true civil society is emerging in Bulgaria. I have won, but democracy, too, has won."*

**Stefan Savov**, DP chair: *"I believed the primary could not take place beyond the soil of the United States but it has and I am pleased. The turnout was an important signal that the voters have overcome their fear and are ready to express their discontent with the government."*

**Ivan Kostov**, UDF chairman: *"This [the primary] could mean the revival of the democratic alternative. The results should not be monopolized by the UDF. This may be more harmful than helpful for the process. This is a huge vote for a Bulgarian democratic alternative and this is what UDF has always stood for."*

**Hristo Bisserov**, CEC co-chair, UDF secretary general: *"The primaries, in the long run, will stimulate society to incorporate the lessons of democracy. . .the ordinary Bulgarian gradually gets accustomed to the idea that even one single vote counts."*

**Dimiter Steffanov**, DP foreign secretary: *"Never again will any serious nomination be allowed to proceed without some process like a primary taking place."*

**Anastassia Moser**, BANU secretary-in-chief: *"The opposition has accomplished what it set out to do in the primary and we in the BANU will see the process through. We are pleased with the voter turnout. It indicates that Bulgarian citizens have woken up. . . apathy is being overcome."*

**Dr. Evgenii Dainov**, noted political historian: *"The success of the primaries lies in the unexpectedly high turnout; in the perfect self-organization of parties which used to hate each other; in the euphoric atmosphere of election day. . . Within the context of Socialist devastation this enthusiasm will be an important component of the rising edifice of Bulgarian democracy. . . The people who initiated the primaries have secured their place in the history books as the people who cleared Bulgaria's road to Europe."*

**Julia Gourkovska**, President Zhelev's chief of staff: *"I am happy that the primary election succeeded in unifying the opposition. It was always my hope that they would do so. . .The primaries for me show that one man could not stand against a party. . . For me personally the unexpectedly huge turnout was an expression of people's anger, and it was a vote of no-confidence in the government or rather in their policy, in everything that has been happening to us. The primaries came as an opportunity for them to [express their anger] in a democratic way. The only other possible reaction would have been to take to the streets."*



**Those who initiated the primaries have secured their place in the history books  
as the people who cleared Bulgaria's road to Europe.**

*-- Evgeenii Dainov, noted political historian*

## **Executive Summary**

On Saturday, June 1, 1996 Bulgaria's democratic parties of the opposition held a national primary election to select a joint presidential nominee. In doing so, Bulgaria became the first country outside the United States to have adopted a version of the primary. This accomplishment, extraordinary in itself, is even more remarkable given the backdrop of historical fractiousness which has plagued the democratic parties throughout the region. These parties have seldom risen above personal animosities to achieve common political purpose and the results, as in Poland, have proved disastrous. In Bulgaria, the pro-democratic parties learned the lesson of their Central European cousins and vowed not to repeat their mistake.

Recognizing the need to unite for this fall's upcoming presidential contest, the myriad parties of the center-right opposition initially perceived the primary process as nothing more than a mechanistic means of resolving internal divisions. Nonetheless, the primary as a process took on a logic and binding nature of its own as the participants overcame numerous obstacles through often painful compromise. Thus, the process of constructing a primary, supported and galvanized by IRI, transmuted itself into a coalition building exercise which, as one political commentator noted, "has transformed the political landscape of Bulgaria, consolidating it."

The IRI-facilitated primary process was initially undertaken by the three democratic, opposition groups in parliament: the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF), the People's Union coalition (PU), made up of the Democratic Party (DP) and the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union (BANU), and the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF). These three parties remained the driving force behind the primary process but once the basic structures of the primary were in place, extra-parliamentary groups were also invited to join. Some, such as the Bulgarian Social Democratic Party (BSDP), formally signed the primary agreement pledging to participate in and respect the results of the primary election while others chose simply to be active in the campaign of one of the two candidates, either incumbent President Zhelyu Zhelev (supported by the PU) or UDF deputy chair and MP Peter Stoyanov.

The primary, as an open "private election," cost one tenth of a typical general election, involved thousands of people in its organization and implementation and ultimately drew over 855,000 voters to the polls -- three times the number expected.

When the Political Council, composed of the leaders of the parliamentary opposition parties, announced the official results on June 4, UDF candidate Stoyanov became the presidential nominee of the united opposition, having garnered some 65 percent of the vote. President Zhelev shortly thereafter pledged

his support in order to keep the Presidency in the hands of the opposition. For his part, Stoyanov hailed his win as a victory, not for himself or his party, but for democracy in Bulgaria.

The political maturity evidenced in such statements indicates the degree to which Bulgaria's opposition has learned the painful lessons of the past few years and is a vindication of IRI's support for the primary process. In uniting to confront the Bulgarian Socialist Party in the fall, the leaders of the opposition have not only bucked the overall trend in the region but have done so in a way that has energized the often apathetic electorate and provided a transparent, replicable model for others to follow. As one party leader remarked, "Never again will serious candidates be proposed without going through some sort of primary process."

## **Background**

IRI began its work in Bulgaria in January 1990 assisting opposition groups in roundtable discussions with the ruling party. These negotiations eventually culminated in the scheduling of multi-party elections in June 1990. Assistance to the democratically oriented Union of Democratic Forces (UDF), a working coalition of numerous smaller parties, continued into and through the 1990 and 1991 election cycles. Emphasis was placed on party organizational training at both the national and local, grassroots levels. Additionally, the national party leaders were provided training designed to improve communications between the two levels of party structure.

In March of 1994, IRI reopened an office in Sofia to continue and expand its programming. To date the resident program officers (RPOs) have developed and maintained a strong network of contacts at the national party level (with numerous democratically inclined parties, both inside and out of parliament), provided assistance and expertise in the formation of effective local party structures (through both national leaders and grassroots activists), and created and distributed various publications on party organizational methods and campaign techniques.

From May until November 1995 the two current RPOs concentrated their efforts in a limited number of cities in order to strengthen the local political party structures and improve direct voter contact communications. The aim of these efforts was to better prepare pro-democratic parties for the fall 1995 municipal elections while strengthening the party structure as a whole for future electoral endeavors, including the 1996 Presidential election. The RPOs were successful in training grassroots activists (who in turn trained other activists) in local party development programs, educating candidates and their campaign managers in essential strategies and tactics, and working with national leaders, including MPs, in effective, internal party communications. The ultimate goal of all of the IRI's activities has been to build viable, national, political parties, thus strengthening the foundations of democracy in Bulgaria.

One of IRI's specific goals during the municipal elections was to encourage the opposition parties to form joint campaigns around a single mayoral candidate. It was thought that the fractured nature of the opposition at the national level could be circumvented by challenging local political leaders to join together. As a result, coalition building became a key component of workshops and IRI succeeded in having its first multi-party workshops. There was a widespread general recognition by the local party leaderships that unless they presented a unified front in the municipal elections against the BSP they would stand little chance of winning. Yet, with very few exceptions, the opposition parties remained divided, allowing personal and political differences at the national level to impede joint action. Even when the national leaders managed to sign a principle agreement to support joint candidates there was no mechanism proposed to arrive at joint candidacies. Moreover, there was no provision stipulating that the agreement be binding in any way. In the end, the signed agreement became a political tool with which one party might harass the other for proving a disloyal partner.

Although the parliamentary parties could not come up with mechanisms to unite themselves, the UDF (and to varying degrees the other democratically-inclined parties) did make initial, tentative steps toward using a caucus system to select mayoral candidates. However, the mechanism, which varied from municipality to municipality, produced haphazard results with the majority of candidates being the heads of their respective UDF chapters. Moreover, this incipient caucus system remained a strictly internal party procedure. Members or supporters of other similarly minded parties were unable to put forward candidates and were prohibited from participating in the actual vote.

Where IRI's training and education were adopted and adapted, however, concrete results were produced. Perhaps the best example remains the mayoral race in Stara Zagora. The Stara Zagora "miracle," so-called by Bulgarians because the mayoral candidate was given little chance of winning there, quickly became the very model of how to conduct a successful, western-style campaign in Bulgaria. The victory here of a few percentage points, however, did not arise solely out of the enormous talent and energy of those working in the campaign. With the parties as divided in Stara Zagora as in other cities, the IRI RPOs continually urged a joint campaign which was ultimately achieved through lengthy negotiations between the parties. Having summoned both the political will and trust to work closely together, the united opposition in Stara Zagora provided the rest of the country with a model of what was possible in Bulgarian politics, a model which would be key during the primary process.

In the aftermath of the municipal elections, which the BSP won decisively due in large part to the persistent division of the opposition, attention turned to the presidential race. The same divisive problems immediately manifested themselves -- and were in many instances exacerbated by the prestige of the office in question.

Yet a solution remained out of reach. The national leaders could find no room for compromise, as had been achieved in Stara Zagora. It was at this stage that IRI, having maintained a respected, neutral position within the opposition space, was asked to suggest alternative means by which the Gordian knot might be cut.

As has been done following every election, IRI conducted an in-depth survey of Bulgaria's political landscape. The study indicated what was already patently obvious: the opposition parties were perceived as irresponsible and unnecessarily factious by the electorate. At the same time, the survey highlighted a profound desire on the part of the opposition electorate to unite around a joint candidate. Several means of achieving this goal were broached by the parties, the two most serious of which were intensive, roundtable type negotiations and the development of a primary. IRI had been involved with roundtable negotiations just after the initial changes and felt that, given the current political climate, they could not succeed. It was also felt that IRI could not offer much additional training or support in this area.

The development of a primary, thus, had more potential and dove-tailed more fully with IRI's on-going programming objectives. IRI believed that a successfully implemented, primary process would accomplish numerous short-term and longer-term objectives. It would, first of all, help build viable coalitions. Reversing a five year pattern of fragmentation, merely negotiating a primary would compel the various center-right parties and coalitions to move beyond personal animosities to settle concrete, practical problems together. In doing so, they would demonstrate the genesis of a new political maturity which could only contribute to the growth and stabilization of the democratic process in Bulgaria. The primary process as a *process* would thereby create its own structural logic that would prove binding whether elections were held or not.

There were other reasons to support a primary process. An intra-party presidential primary, as a transparent and open process of candidate selection, would engage voters on a grassroots level. Although Bulgarians still vote in higher percentages than many Western democracies, significant elements of the electorate have grown disillusioned. According to Eurobarometer tracking polls, in fact, Bulgarians as a whole remain the most disappointed in democracy of any of the former Warsaw Pact countries. Bulgaria's democratic institutions are still, six years after the changes, in an embryonic stage. Thus the use of such a novel and open means to involve additional voters, though risky, could potentially add to the stability of democracy. A poll conducted by IRI during the primary construction process corroborated this hypothesis by showing that an overwhelming percentage of the opposition's electorate were "euphoric" over the prospect of uniting behind a single presidential candidate through a primary process.

For specific parties participating in the primary process, a primary election would allow their organizations, from the local to the national level, to gain valuable experience in a less brutal (though no less important), national campaign. It is

through campaigns, where parties have a candidate and issues on which to focus, that party structures at all levels can more easily be strengthened and grown. Many of the parties and coalitions which would be involved in the primary are smaller, extraparliamentary groups which could use the several weeks of the campaign to solidify and expand their bases of support. The same would hold true for the larger, parliamentary parties, which have had few general elections in which to put their new structures to a test. Finally, the nature of a primary would continue the process of decentralization as local chapters would be allowed to take initiative that was difficult to take even during the local elections.

To move from project conception to implementation, however, seemed at best improbable. An intensive educational and negotiation exercise would have to be undertaken, overcoming incalculable obstacles in the process. IRI's first steps to constructively tackle the challenge were to research the United States' primary "system" and to make suggestions as to how to make the most promising elements relevant to the Bulgarian context. While IRI was at work developing a concept paper along these lines, the UDF leadership body passed an official resolution discarding the notion of roundtable negotiations in favor of a more open procedure, mentioning a primary as the preferred alternative.

With public support for the primary concept building, IRI, as a respected, neutral organization, was able to convene a "working group" of political leaders, experts, and analysts. IRI presented its paper on how Bulgaria could adapt and even improve on the American variant and then continued to lead the discussion between the politicians on the Working Group (WG) who were initially mistrustful of one another. Soon, however, the members of the WG managed to agree more than disagree and reached a consensus that they would do what they could to advance the primary idea. The internal logic of the primary process was bearing its first fruits. Within weeks they had drafted a primary agreement and at this stage could not proceed further without the political legitimacy of their respective political leaderships.

At this stage, IRI organized a three-day conference to both continue the educational effort and to allow a free and open discussion of the WG's document which specified the details by which a primary might be implemented in Bulgaria. Held at a business retreat center, the so-called "Bistritza conference" proved to be a watershed event for the primary and perhaps for Bulgarian democracy as well. The conference began with presentations by two U.S. experts. The first placed the evolution of the U.S. primary system within its historical context while the second concentrated on the rationales behind the technical and legal variations of primaries from state to state. Having set the stage for a fuller discussion, the WG was asked to present its draft document to the gathered political leaders. Moderated by the IRI RPOs, the ensuing debate eventually transformed itself into a negotiation over the finer points of what remained a hypothetical election.

But earnest negotiation was only just beginning at the Bistritza conference. In the ensuing weeks, IRI played the role of honest broker as the draft agreement was chiseled into a document that ultimately formed the foundation for holding the primary. In the meantime, IRI also lent its expertise on other fronts, most notably in financing, by drafting potential budgets for the process. Working closely with USAID/Sofia, IRI also secured additional funds in its operating budget to go directly toward financing key portions of the primary itself. As a last measure to gauge the populace's readiness to participate in a primary, IRI funded a poll for the WG conducted by the National Statistical Institute of Bulgaria which showed overwhelming support both for the potential of a primary election and for a joint candidate.

Once the primary agreement was signed, the signatories began work immediately to implement what was, in essence, a large-scale private election open to all Bulgarian citizens. IRI continued to play a decisive role by ensuring that proper training was conducted, helping to raise additional funds, and maintaining its role as an honest broker among the parties that continued to have important (but surmountable) differences of opinion. IRI, as a neutral party, also undertook to oversee the educational campaign which was crucially important given the novel nature of the election. If turnout failed to reach an unspecified threshold the entire results of the election could have been called into question. Having organized numerous get out the vote campaigns over the years, IRI had the requisite experience in this field again, placing it in a key position.

All of the organizational effort and IRI's own key role throughout the development and implementation of the primary process could have proved largely pointless, however, if the national leadership of the parties had not taken ownership of the process and demonstrated two key ingredients of leadership. First, the political leaders had to demonstrate political will to stay the course and to see the process through. Second, they had to risk trusting one another. In exhibiting these mutually dependent and reinforcing ingredients, the Bulgarian center-right parties had the possibility to demonstrate their collective movement out of political infancy. They also had the possibility of strengthening Bulgarian democracy and, in the process, deepening the tender shoots of Bulgaria's civil society.

## The Primary Process to Election Day

In the middle of the heated and difficult municipal election campaigns in the fall of 1995, talk already turned to finding a mechanism to unite the opposition for the following year's presidential contest. The importance of such discussions was highlighted at an IRI-organized conference in September where the first mention of a primary was broached and rejected out of hand. As had become typical, members from all democratic, opposition parties had been invited to participate in the conference. Unlike previous conferences, however, tensions were running high between the different parties as negotiations for joint mayoral candidates had broken down across the country. This ill will manifested itself in vociferous arguments filled with accusations of back-stabbing and betrayal. Though the national party leaders had announced their willingness to unite in as many municipalities as possible to jointly face the BSP, the lack of binding provisions created a reality that was far different with the center-right parties fighting both the Socialists and one another. Hence after the votes were counted, the "opposition" in national government became the opposition in most municipalities, as well.

Into the uneasy and tension-ridden aftermath of the municipal elections came the surprise announcement by incumbent President Zhelyu Zhelev that he intended to seek re-election, an announcement that significantly came on the heels of Lech Walesa's defeat in Poland. President Zhelev's proclamation sparked an immediate and vociferous condemnation by the UDF, the leadership of which had not been consulted about the president's decision. The relationship between the UDF and their former leader had been deteriorating since 1992 but the President's unilateral announcement threatened a complete break.

Despite the rancor, party leaders and strategists, key members of the presidency, a myriad of pollsters, and political scientists all agreed that only by uniting to support a single presidential candidate could the opposition retain the hope of defeating the BSP candidate in the fall. This core realization would ultimately provide the soil in which the primary seed would grow as each proffered alternative was considered and discarded in turn. At this time, however, the primary concept was not considered a viable option and a number of alternatives were put forward, including national opinion polls and roundtable negotiations. IRI deepened its involvement during this stage by sharing the results of its post-election analysis with key decision makers and by holding high level exploratory meetings between IRI's President and Eastern European Director and opposition party leaders to discuss the primary option. As 1995 drew to a close the primary idea which had seemed the most problematic option was beginning to look a little more promising. A consensus among the parties remained far off, however.

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1. Please see IRI report "Municipal Election Report, October 1995," for a discussion of the local elections.

As momentum gathered for the primary in early January, IRI, believing that this was the best option for the opposition, became more actively involved by providing guidance and information. Meetings with political leaders and activists were stepped up to provide clear explanations of the primary concept and its attendant costs, risks and potential rewards. Realizing that without a politically legitimate consensus on the primary concept progress would be very limited, IRI formed a "Working Group" of political leaders, analysts, and technocrats. The concept paper referred to above was also drafted at this time as was the first time line which slated election day for the primary for June 22, 1996.

It was IRI's hope that by bringing responsible people together to work on the primary project, a mode of cooperation and the beginnings of trust could be instilled. Before the Working Group could hold its first meeting, however, the UDF National Coordinating Council (NCC) announced its intentions to formally debate and vote on the concept of the primary. Although there was support for the primary within the UDF leadership, it was far from unanimous. There were real fears the NCC could vote down the measure in favor of national polls, roundtable negotiations, or, worse, a separate UDF candidate to face President Zhelev in the first round of the general election.

The UDF's experience with their own internal caucuses, the information already communicated on presidential primaries, and strong stances in favor of the primary by key UDF leaders ultimately won out. The NCC of the UDF, after two weeks of debate, formally endorsed the primary in a resolution which expressed the view that the primary represented the most transparent means to achieve a single presidential candidate for a united opposition.

Although the NCC's decision overcame a significant obstacle, it created a series of mini-obstacles for the constituent parties of the People's Union. Their distrust of the UDF, especially after the municipal elections, was only heightened by the UDF's warm embrace of the primary, what one WG member referred to as a "bear hug." Signs of conciliation were shown a week prior to the NCC vote, when Ivan Kostov, the UDF chairman, accepted an invitation of meet with President Zhelev -- who was supported by the PU -- to discuss their common agenda. The presidential elections were not discussed, however.

For its part the PU demonstrated its good will by permitting its representatives within the WG to continue meeting. Although skeptical about a primary, they wanted to remain involved in the process of uniting the opposition behind a single candidate. In their view, the first step was to discuss the primary idea, dispose of it, and move on, believing that negotiation might prove easier afterwards.

Distrust was not the only challenge in the initial working group meetings. Although Bulgarians are adept at holding elections, the intricacies of a primary election (or caucus) were generally unknown to them, and once detailed information

was distributed, the various adaptations necessary for Bulgaria became a source of friction between the different camps. Still, the tactic of keeping WG members focused on the issues at hand began to pay off as the group as a whole began to take ownership of the idea.

Beginning from a prototype “Agreement on Holding a Presidential Primary Election,” the Working Group ultimately crafted a document which outlined the elements necessary to hold an actual election. A number of important questions remained beyond the purview of the WG, however. These related to polling sites (number and placement), the number of days on which to hold the election (one, two, or three), registration of voters, and the participation of extraparliamentary parties. The time had come to expand the circle of those involved by bringing the leaders of the parliamentary opposition parties together to discuss whether the primary concept should become an actual process.

IRI organized a conference at a business retreat center in Bistritza, a mountainside village just outside of Sofia. Under inclimate conditions, leaders of the UDF, PU, and MRF, as well as representatives from the Presidency, gathered with the Working Group for an intensive weekend. The seminar began with presentations by two US experts sponsored by IRI. The first, Dr. Daniel Stid, gave an historical overview of the development of the primaries in the US, pointing out its many quirks and oddities but emphasizing its power and legitimacy in the American political system. Dr. Stid was followed by Ms. Rebecca Jackson, County Clerk for Louisville, Kentucky, who addressed the problems that various states sought to resolve in their respective election laws related to primaries.

Following the American presentations, the WG, perhaps unaware just how much they had already invested in the primary agreement, presented the draft with a single voice. The ultimate tone of the conference was set by Democratic Party chairman Stephen Savov’s first question when he incredulously asked, “Does this agreement represent the consensus of the working group?” Although answered with a definitive, if surprising, “yes,” the finer details of the prospective agreement remained unresolved and the negotiation sessions which followed were often difficult. With the formerly impossible primary becoming feasible, each political grouping sought to safeguard its own perceived interest. The UDF, dedicated to the primary as the best opportunity to unite the opposition around their candidate but knowing that they could too easily overplay their hand, attempted to ease the fears of the other participants. The PU attempted to gain consensus on issues which would play to their strengths and hence were toughest on the number of poll sites which necessarily would be reduced from the 12,500 of the local elections. Both the MRF and representatives of the Presidency remained at a more neutral distance, content to both listen and observe.

By the conclusion of the conference, the gathered political leaders had targeted a number of issues for continued discussion (number of polling sites, how

to select the vice-presidential candidate, registration of voters, number of days to hold the election, the possibility of a national poll, etc.) and requested that the WG tackle these problems before presenting them with a more finalized document. In so doing, they further legitimized the WG's efforts which gave individual WG members greater confidence and authority. Other serious issues, such as fear within an electorate that might naturally prefer to remain politically anonymous and the profound distrust between the parties, though unresolved, had become less important. It was recognized that neither could be eliminated all together. Instead, the parties would simply have to try incrementally to reduce both as far as they could.

Peter Stoyanov, ultimately the UDF's presidential candidate but at this point acting as UDF vice-chair, commented that at the Bistritza conference "an important stride forward was taken. . .my expectations are that we could sign an agreement for a common nomination. The primary elections seem the best possible way of nominating a single candidate." Other participants, though not as positive, remained hopeful. Kassim Dal, of the MRF: "There is much left to decide. We in the MRF, however, want to reach an agreement on a single nomination." Virginia Velcheva from the Presidency: "It is natural to seek ways which could lead us to a single nomination. The idea of a primary election must be explored with all the risks and dangers it involves."

The exploration Ms. Velcheva referred to was continued not only by the Working Group, which diligently resolved all the issues raised in Bistritza, but by the public and an expanding number of politicians as well. Some of the latter, such as Emil Koshlukov (leader of Concord for Bulgaria, a group of intellectuals supportive of President Zhelev) and Dimiter Ludgev (leader of extraparliamentary party New Choice), attempted to kill the process outright through strongly argued misinformation or unworkable ideas such as having a petition competition -- the candidate who receives the most signatures would be the nominee. Others, notably those in the BANU, attempted to constructively address the concerns raised in Bistritza by offering solutions or to present earnest alternatives. The option which gained the most credibility was that of a national poll, and it soon became the rallying point for the anti-primary forces.

President Zhelev at the time was ahead in all polls conducted by Bulgarian polling firms, although the 20 percent support he was garnering could not have been too encouraging. At this point, in mid-February, the UDF had yet to determine the trio of final contenders for its nominee, let alone the candidate himself. As the UDF made progress through its internal caucus/primary system, candidate options narrowed to Assen Agov, an initial strong supporter of the primary; Alexander Yordanov, representative of the UDF's right wing; and UDF deputy chair Stoyanov all of whom then began competing for support amongst UDF's municipal organizations. The Working Group tackled the other remaining issues, and debate on the national poll idea continued.

A month later, the national poll alternative reached critical mass and a version was incorporated into the primary process. A number of factors produced this compromise. First, the UDF refused to back off the primary idea, and even increased the pressure when Kostov publicly stated that no other mechanism existed which could be both binding and indicative. President Zhelev, he said, had no choice but to participate. In addition, persuasive arguments from all quarters were brought against the poll idea: the inherent unreliability of polls in Bulgaria, their inability to test the feelings of voters, the ease with which they can be manipulated, and a lack of money to conduct them (though IRI had begun securing money to hold a primary election and would ultimately pay for a smaller national poll, it refused to commit funds to this broader idea for the above reasons). In the end, a compromise was reached: a poll would be conducted to determine the reception of a primary among the opposition supporters nationwide. If the results showed that a primary could not work in Bulgaria, the primary would be set aside and other options explored.

The poll, commissioned by the Working Group, paid for by IRI, and conducted by the National Statistical Institute of Bulgaria, found strong support for the primary and overwhelming support for a single candidate of a unified opposition. An analysis of the cross tabulations indicated that opposition supporters firmly believed that the primary would be a democratic, participatory, mobilizing process and that through primaries the opposition would learn to work together. Finally, an overwhelming majority felt that the primary was the only way to attain a single presidential candidate.

Having resolved the issue of whether opposition-affiliated Bulgarians were prepared to participate in a primary election, the remaining issues were hammered out by the WG. Three thousand polling sites were agreed to which, it was mathematically calculated, would cover better than 95 percent of the opposition's voters. The relatively high number of polling sites represented a victory for the PU which insisted on additional sites to cover the smaller towns and villages where their strength lay. The vice-presidential running mate of the winner of the primary would be selected by the political powers which backed the losing candidate, thus binding the opposition in yet another way for the presidential contest. Registration of voters was dropped. It would be too time consuming, too costly, ultimately ineffective, and anti-democratic. Instead, still concerned about potential BSP interference, the WG recommended that the criteria for becoming a candidate be exceedingly strict and that same-day registration be adopted as a means to safeguard against massive BSP participation. The number of election days, ranging from one to three in ongoing debates, was set for the unique day of Saturday, June 1, 1996. It was argued that giving citizens more than one day to vote might increase participation, but it would also increase cost and potentially call into question the security of the ballots.

Funding for the primary was, by this time, not a significant problem. A commitment from IRI, potential donations from other foreign institutes and parties, and the

readiness of the parties to contribute in-kind ensured that the entire budget could be covered, a budget which, at the end of March, was estimated to be between \$700,000 and \$750,000 -- about one-tenth of the cost of a general election in Bulgaria -- though it would be one quarter the size.

Besides resolving outstanding technical issues, the Working Group also continued to build public and political consensus around the primary agreement by meeting with the leaders who would ultimately make the decision on whether to hold the election: Kostov, Savov, Mrs. Anastassia Moser of BANU, Ahmed Dogan of the MRF, and President Zhelev. After their meeting with Dogan, the leader of the MRF stated that "the joint nomination is an historical chance and crucial test for the united opposition." Gaining the support of the MRF was a significant achievement and boosted the primary's chances considerably. Zhelev was positive as well, calling the project of the Working Group "a contribution to democracy in Bulgaria."

The next crucial test for the primary was gaining the approval of the UDF National Convention and the BANU Steering Committee. Both parties were holding their annual national meetings on the same weekend: March 23 and 24. Not only would they be debating the primary agreement which the leaders had initialed the week before, they would also be selecting their nominees for the presidency. While it was certain the UDF would approve the primary, it was not known who their candidate would be. For BANU, the situation was the exact opposite: Zhelev would be the candidate, but would they agree to participate in the primary? As Stoyanov emerged as the UDF's candidate by a commanding margin over his rivals, word reached the UDF convention that the BANU and their candidate would in fact be competing in the primary. The message was delivered by Mrs. Moser personally who shocked UDF supporters by visiting the convention. Good hearted chants of "Unity! Unity!" greeted her announcement.

The leaders of the parliamentary parties/coalitions signed the primary agreement shortly thereafter, on Friday, March 29. The two candidates followed just over a week later. But first there was one outstanding issue to debate and decide upon: the issue of tolerance. Zhelev's backers (and the president himself) had witnessed the effective negative campaign the UDF had conducted against the PU and its candidate, Reneta Indjova, in last year's contest for mayor of Sofia. They also knew that certain factions within the UDF would use the excuse of a primary campaign to mount blistering attacks on Zhelev. The PU wished to avoid a negative campaign both because they understood the advantages the UDF would gain by it, but also because they felt it would undermine the ultimate purpose of the primary -- to unite the opposition behind a single candidate. The PU, with public backing from Zhelev, insisted that an extra clause be added to the primary agreement to guarantee a tolerant campaign. The initial reaction from UDF activists was to express concern that Zhelev and his supporters were looking for an escape clause to be used if the President lost the election. They soon agreed to its inclusion, however, after Stoyanov stated he couldn't think of running anything but a tolerant,

positive campaign. (It didn't hurt that Stoyanov's numbers were on the rise and that by signing the agreement with the additional clause, Stoyanov's team would not have to worry about attacks on their candidate). With the agreement signed, work turned toward implementing its provisions. The initial step was forming the three governing bodies of the process:

1. **The Political Council.** Composed of six political leaders, two from each of the three parliamentary opposition powers. The Political Council had overall responsibility for the success of the primary. All disputes not resolvable by the other committees were sent to the Political Council. The Political Council also decided upon the broad public relations strategies and announced the official results of the election.

2. **The Victory Foundation.** The Board of the Foundation was composed of six political leaders from the trio of parliamentary groups. This organization, officially registered in the Bulgarian courts for this specific job, was charged with raising and expending all funds for the primary process. The Foundation developed the budget, raised money, approved bids and contracts with printshops, etc. and ensured that everyone was paid appropriately. All money for the primary flowed through its bank account(s), overseen by both a professional accountant and the Board. Once its books were balanced and closed, the Foundation was dissolved.

3. **The Central Election Committee (CEC).** This body was also composed of representatives from the parliamentary opposition parties/coalitions. Its responsibility was to implement the organizational mechanisms necessary to hold an election. It wrote more specific rules under which the primary election was held, placed the polling sites throughout the country, appointed members to the 31 Regional Election Committees (which in turn appointed members to the Sectional Election Committees), and oversaw all other logistical tasks, including vote tabulation.

Although by the conclusion of the process all three bodies were working well together (almost as a family, as a member of the CEC put it), there were a number of challenges to face during the implementation process. Of these, the most urgent and serious concerned the distribution and placement of polling sites. Each participating party knew that poll site placement would be key to enhancing their vote count. The UDF, its strength lying in the larger cities where the opposition vote was concentrated, claimed a larger proportion of the poll sites for the population centers. The PU, on the other hand, argued that their voters in the villages could not be ignored and wanted more village polling places. The MRF, satisfied with the number of sites allotted to its regions, was able to act as an arbitrator for the other two factions during the protracted negotiations.

The CEC had been charged under the Agreement with negotiating the geographic distribution of the polling sites and had managed to settle 28 of the 31

regions. As a deadlock on the remaining regions entered its third day, however, the CEC co-chairs asked for the arbitration of the Political Council. In the end, the debate over polling site placement -- and the time it took -- came closest to killing the process. But since the political will and commitment to the primary process had been found, the Bulgarian participants were loathe to allow the process to collapse. No one walked out of the negotiations and a mere three weeks before the scheduled election a solution was achieved by increasing the number of polling sites to just over 3,000 and distributing most of them to the countryside.

As the Regional and Sectional Election Committees finished off the site-specific organization and the Victory Foundation fine-tuned the budget to ensure enough resources were available, IRI launched a national, educational, Get-Out-The-Vote (GOTV) campaign. Under the slogan of "You decide. Bulgaria Wins." the educational campaign saturated the airwaves, filled the newspapers, and went door to door through leaflets. The capstone of the educational campaign was the coordination of regional and local newspaper advertisements which printed the full listing of polling sites.

The respective political campaigns of the two candidates also shifted into high gear. Although Stoyanov's team had launched his campaign before either he or Zhelev had signed the primary agreement, most continued to believe the primary was Zhelev's race to lose. The powers of incumbency -- name recognition, easy access to the press, a built-in organization -- were at his command. A loose coalition of both parliamentary and extraparliamentary forces formed around him to bring their support and add another level of activism to his campaign. Unfortunately for Zhelev, not all those supporting his candidacy were supportive of the primary and proceeded to send out conflicting signals about whether the President would abide by the results -- these statements being made after Zhelev had signed the agreement. Divisions among the coalition members added to the organizational problems of his campaign as did a shortfall in fundraising. Still, Zhelev, in a grueling schedule, barnstormed the country, making appearances in cities and villages almost every day, often with the political leaders of the PU. Leaflets, posters, and buttons were produced and distributed; radio spots hit the air as well -- all reminding the voters of Zhelev's electability both now and in the fall.

The UDF responded with a tightly organized campaign casting Stoyanov as the "new face" of the UDF and hope for Bulgaria's future. Stoyanov travelled the country, raising his name recognition and pressing his agenda. The leaders of the UDF travelled both with him and separately, covering a vast amount of the country in a short amount of time. Their efforts were bolstered by posters, buttons, leaflets, and aggressively placed radio ads. Most importantly, however, the UDF activated its local structures for the campaign. Having worked diligently over the past year and a half to create a party from top to bottom, the primary campaign was the first national election in which the UDF was able to test its organizational abilities.

Stoyanov's campaign concluded in UDF's tradition: with a rally outside the Alexander Nevski Cathedral, attracting thousands of boisterous, excited supporters.

Although all aspects of the process appeared ready the night before the election, members of both the CEC and IRI were nonetheless somewhat nervous. This was, after all, the first primary election to be held in Europe and the first privately run election in Bulgaria, as well. The only thing the organizers could do at that point was to trust in the preparations and hope for a high turnout and no irregularities.

## **Election Day, June 1, 1996**

In the June 1 issue of *Standart* newspaper, respected political commentator and sociologist Dr. Deyan Kyuranov noted, "Despite the pessimistic forecasts that primaries would prove impossible to organize in this country, they are going to take place today. No matter what happens, the opposition has demonstrated a surprising organizational culture and a will for unity." But with polls published the day before indicating that turnout could be as low as 10 percent (which could jeopardize the entire process), there was reason for concern that the process -- which had gone from concept to reality in less than six months -- could fail for lack of participation.

Early on Saturday morning more than 20,000 party activists headed to the polling sites to administer the election. Throughout Bulgaria the polls opened promptly at 7:00 a.m., many with voters already waiting in line. IRI, coordinating efforts with the Westminster Foundation for Democracy and the U.S. Embassy in Sofia, deployed its team to eight key regions to provide neutral observation for the elections, the Bulgarian Association for Fair Elections (BAFE) having declined to participate.

By midday on election day it was clear that everything was going better than anyone had expected. Against a backdrop of latent fear, long bread lines, and a quickly unfolding economic crisis, Bulgarians put their faith in a novel process and went to the polls in overwhelming numbers. The CEC even began to receive reports around 1 p.m. that some regions were running low on ballots. Statements days earlier by political leaders equating a vote in the primary to a vote of no-confidence in the government undoubtedly inspired additional involvement. However, it is a credit to the two candidates' campaigns, the educational campaign, and the efforts of party leaders and activists to motivate their supporters that a feeling of excitement and even euphoria swept through the polling sites. The IRI-funded pre-agreement poll proved correct: voters, given the opportunity, would participate enthusiastically in an open process designed to give them the right to select the opposition's joint candidate.

The Political Council had never established a minimum threshold of participation required to make the election legitimate. However, the most optimistic poll conducted before the election predicted that 350,000 people would vote which was considered high enough to legitimize the election but not high enough to definitively quash potential challenges. The question proved irrelevant, however, as the final turnout fell just short of an incredible 860,000 votes. Of these, less than one percent were considered invalid, the lowest percentage of invalid ballots in any Bulgarian election. As one radio reporter noted in her report on election night, "June first has been a big day for a little country." When the remaining 850,028 ballots were tabulated, UDF candidate Stoyanov received 65.7 percent of the total, winning in what could only be described as a landslide.

## Conclusion

On Tuesday, June 4, 1996 the Political Council announced the official results, nominating Stoyanov as the “candidate of the joint opposition for victory in the fall.” Shortly thereafter President Zhelev read a statement on national television in which he not only accepted the results but pledged his support to Stoyanov’s candidacy. In doing so, Dr. Zhelev rose above the pettiness so often evident in post-communist politics and ensured his legacy as the father of Bulgarian democracy. The primary, in the limited sense of having produced a joint candidate, had been a total success. The implications, however, remain to be enumerated.

There are at least two sets of conclusions to be derived from Bulgaria’s primary process and election. The first set relates to what the primary reveals about Bulgaria’s emergent civil society and the second set relates to the primary’s medium to long-term political implications.

*For Bulgaria’s civil society, the primary results chiefly indicate that party politics is ascendent over personality-based politics.*

In contrast to the situation in Russia, for instance, where the power of the President’s personality may supercede his need to depend on party structures, Bulgaria’s opposition has demonstrated that one man cannot stand against a well organized party. At least initially, many were convinced that President Zhelev’s respectable approval rating and low negatives among non-UDF opposition voters would be enough to carry him to victory. The results repudiated this belief. The UDF, in implementing an aggressive, grass roots campaign on a national scale, has finally demonstrated that it has succeeded, at least partially, in transforming itself from a coalition into a true political party based on political cleavages and the need to attract votes. Its success bodes well for the future of party development in Bulgaria and may provide an incentive to other pro-democratic parties to implement the reforms adopted by the UDF nearly a year and a half ago.

*Secondly, but no less important, the turnout in the primary demonstrates that Bulgarians affiliated with the center-right are overcoming their retrenched fear.*

Since the December 1994 elections and the return to power of the former communists, a great deal of political commentary in opposition circles has focused on the issue of fear as a demobilizer in Bulgarian politics. The hypothesis has been that opposition supporters would simply stop participating in political life for fear of possible retribution from a hostile government (the oft-given example being the loss of a state job). The high turnout in a decidedly partisan election in which names were being recorded indicates that this fear has been overestimated and that

individuals are not in fear of being co-opted, or at least find the risk acceptable given the alternative. This is not to say that such fear has been eliminated. Especially in the smaller towns and villages it remains a factor in electoral politics. Even in Sofia, one UDF supporter confessed to an IRI-observer that she was pretending to shop right before she entered her polling site. She did not want an unfriendly neighbor to see her and perhaps report on her, she explained.

*Finally, the turnout in the primary indicates that the youth of Bulgaria are not as disaffected as alleged by numerous pundits.*

In the Sofia region, youth turnout for the primary in some areas was as much as three times higher than in the local elections. There were a number of reasons for this including unconventional polling sites in areas in which students vote -- ticket booths at bus stops, for instance. However, anecdotal evidence would suggest that the primary itself created a motivating impulse as the youth were attracted by the euphoric feeling of participating in something new and somewhat rebellious. They also had an attractive candidate in Peter Stoyanov to whom they felt some kinship. His leaflet included a picture of himself from the 1970's that demonstrated his anti-establishment credentials. Although more analysis must be done to strengthen this particular conclusion, most urban polling sites reported much higher youth voting than in the past.

The conclusions for the immediate political landscape are the following:

*First, the primary process served to consolidate the center-right, democratic space in ways that had not been forecast at the outset but could have been.*

The primary, like the presidential race itself, was a majoritarian race. For this reason, smaller, non-parliamentary parties were cautious in their embrace of the primary process and some adamantly opposed to it. The reason for this is simple: by opening up candidate selection to the people, the influence of individual party leaders was diluted to such an extent that their *raison d'être* and effectiveness could now be called into question. "Why should I vote for them," a reasonable voter might ask. "They have no prospect of exercising power." Instead, this prospective voter may now turn to one of the established parliamentary parties or coalitions.

This consolidation is a normal, healthy process to be expected in democracies emerging from one-party domination. As election law changes and parliamentary thresholds are raised, fewer parties will garner enough support to continue their activities without being absorbed into other, larger formations. It may be predicted, therefore, that Bulgaria will ultimately end up with a two and a half party system *a la* Germany. This was perhaps true even before the primary, but the primary has likely accelerated the process in the sense that it has strengthened the UDF, the largest oppositional party, a great deal.

*Second, and related to the first, the roundtable era is definitively dead in Bulgaria.*

Back in 1990, in the midst of waves of change, it may have made sense for intellectuals and others to come together to mediate their countrymen's desire for a better future. In 1996, however, the influence and appeal of the intellectual as an unelected representative has faded. It is safe to assume that intellectual circles will never again exercise the political clout they did earlier in the decade. This is a second reason the smaller parties objected to the primary and many of them refused to sign onto the agreement. In Roundtable negotiations, their voice was equal to that of the leader of the party with the largest membership rolls. In an election, however, such a leader could only bring their one percent of the electorate, or less, to the table. According to many political leaders in Bulgaria, in the post-primary era all parties will be under tremendous public pressure to submit nominations for all offices to the people for vetting. This is an important legacy of the primary and could mean that parties will field stronger, more accountable candidates in the next parliamentary elections.

*Finally, the primary process is a vindication of the so-called Stara Zagora model in which politicians thinking politically sought to work together to accomplish a common goal.*

As in the Stara Zagora case, the primary has accomplished what many said could not be done. It has brought people together in a political environment that usually pries people apart. If the Stara Zagora model in conjunction with the primary experience can be replicated, there are good reasons to believe that the center-right oriented parties will be able to accomplish their political objectives. There are already indications that such a prognosis has a basis in reality. All of the political institutions established by the Primary Agreement are going to be reconstituted in a slightly different form and are expected to continue beyond the presidential election.

The Political Council, for instance, may even ask Dr. Zhelev to become a member and will move beyond electoral questions to deal with all issues regarding the opposition.

It is true that the primary exceeded almost everybody's expectations in terms of what it set out to do and what it accomplished. It is also true that the process has some longer term implications as outlined above. However, it should be noted that Bulgaria is still a country in transition in which political realities shift like sand in the Gobi desert. The primary process has had an impact, but it will take time to see whether the lessons learned will be applied generally and if old habits and temptations can be resolutely resisted. One thing is certain, however: in the afterglow of an election that no one gave the most remote possibility of actually taking place just six short months ago, everything now seems possible.

## **The Bulgarian Primary: A Template for Replication?**

A presidential primary election is one of the most open, transparent and democratic methods of selecting a party's candidate. It is, however, also one of the most difficult to implement as evidenced by its rare use around the world. The Bulgarian experience, therefore, provides a number of lessons and a checklist of sorts that can be combined to evaluate the viability of a primary-type process in other countries. The following is an attempt to draw out the most important motivations, both positive and negative, as well as other factors which were key in Bulgaria's primary process. Each should be considered necessary conditions when considering replication in Eastern and Central Europe and elsewhere, though none can be seen as sufficient in themselves.

### **Common ideological basis.**

At the very least, those parties and coalitions considering a primary process must share a common ideology, political goal or political rival. If they do not have minimal common ground, the first steps toward creating a primary -- and hence building a coalition through the process -- cannot be expected to work. In the case of Bulgaria, all three were factors. The opposition shared Western-leaning, market-oriented views in direct contrast to the Socialist Party which they all saw as their ultimate and common political enemy. Many of the participants also perceived a need to resolve internal, factional issues which they realized could be done through an opening up of the candidate selection process.

### **A profound conviction that numerous candidates will lead to electoral defeat.**

Where the democratic forces have splintered, as in most of Eastern and Central Europe, this must be the first "fact" accepted by all involved. Without an ultimate political objective -- in this case, the avoidance of definitive defeat in the general election against a common political enemy -- the process can easily lose focus.

In the case of Bulgaria, there was a clear perception that fielding more than one democrat in the first round of the general election would lead to defeat. This lesson had been painfully learned in two previous elections in which bickering and infighting led to massive electoral losses and had been repeatedly reinforced with poll after poll which indicated the Bulgarian electorate would respond to a more united opposition. Whenever negotiations were at the point of meltdown, this hardrock reality would come back into focus.

### **A lack of viable alternatives.**

There are easier and cheaper ways to achieve a single candidate than by staging a national election. The most common has been through inter-party caucusing and intra-party negotiation. If these methods fail, and if a country lacks a tradition of transferring votes in a second round of an election, a primary is an alternative means. With an unbreakable stand-off between the incumbent president and the

largest anti-leftist party, other possibilities had to be considered before being discarded. In many ways, the primary concept was adopted through a convoluted process of elimination.

**Initial exploratory talks must follow a "key" party strategy.**

In most of Eastern and Central Europe there are a plethora of parties, most having extremely small membership. In majoritarian races, these smaller parties have little to bring to the table in a negotiation and may, in fact, attempt to slow or even kill the process. For this reason, initial discussions should involve only the larger political formations. If and when these parties reach some sort of agreement, a more effective outreach effort can then be made to the smaller parties. After Bulgaria's three parliamentary opposition parties signed the initial agreement, for instance, smaller parties/coalitions participated either through officially signing on to the agreement through addenda or by backing one of the candidates.

**An early commitment to the concept by a participating party, though not necessarily the largest.**

Though perhaps not an absolute necessity, the primary concept can be given both local legitimacy as well as a driving force if a party/coalition publicly endorses the concept from the beginning -- even to the extent that they say it is worthy of serious consideration. As a foreign concept, the earlier indigenous politicians support the notion of a primary, the better its prospect. Similarly, if a party takes the lead, it is in a solid position to influence media coverage of the process, and use said coverage to keep other participants involved. In Bulgaria, the UDF, the largest opposition force, backed the primary concept very early and quickly declared that those against it were also against a united opposition and hence for the BSP's continuing dominance. Clearly, such a strong statement could backfire, but in this instance it did not.

**The use of legitimate, though second tier leaders in initial discussions.**

People who have both their party's interests in mind but have the freedom to think independently are the type of people to be invited to initial negotiations. These are the people who have the ability to brainstorm; to openly and informally discuss the concepts necessary to create a primary. Because they are not the leaders of their parties per se they bear less of a burden should initial talks fail to proceed. However, if the talks do move forward they are in a better position to convince their leaders that the process is worth further consideration and commitment. Without such people, the discussions can quickly turn into protracted and difficult negotiations with each delegate having to procure further authorization from their respective leadership. Only when the Bulgarian Working Group, composed of just such people, reached a comfort level with one another and realized there were no repercussions for what was said in the early meetings did progress actually begin.

**No negotiation before education.**

The most logical starting point for examining a new, democratic concept is education. There might be various thoughts on how a primary works, on how it could work in a given country, etc. By beginning with an exploration of how it has worked in other countries, the momentum continues into thinking of how it theoretically could work in the country at hand. This step naturally leads into more possibilities and details of how it could actually work. Eventually, the participants are negotiating the finer points of a primary agreement. The Working Group in Bulgaria was initially brought together in this way, simply to study the concept. Later, they moved on to positing how a primary could actually be implemented in Bulgaria.

### **Education as negotiation.**

As initial negotiations proceed and consensus is reached on certain issues, a commitment to the process itself is built. Participants take ownership of the primary concept and begin working harder to make it succeed even as the negotiating points become more difficult. A point is ultimately reached -- and this is one of the most dangerous stages -- where the failure of the process will do more harm to those involved than if they had otherwise not attempted such a goal. This drives the participants even more to ensure its success. The Working Group ultimately took ownership of the primary agreement and in so doing became a political force in their own right, selling it to the leaders of the participating parties, as well as the president.

### **A trusted, neutral mediator throughout the process.**

An outside stimulus to both the educational effort and early negotiations can be crucial during the process. Because of long personal histories and bitter memories, there is an understandable hesitation on the part of political leaders to participate in discussions with perceived rivals who are often labeled as betrayers. For this reason, having a trusted individual or organization to facilitate early discussions can create the necessary environment in which trust can be built. This individual/organization must be respected by all involved and be perceived as neutral throughout the entire process. He/it will have to act as a shuttle diplomat at times, delivering messages between the participants, acting as an advocate for the process but also allowing legitimate concerns to be expressed and resolved. Ideally, there should be more than one such avenue for informal communication. The International Republican Institute fulfilled this role in Bulgaria as did a few of the non-political party members on the Working Group.

### **Participation of non-party organizations committed to democratic development in the country at hand.**

As alluded to above, indigenous think-tanks and other NGOs, unaffiliated with particular parties but having the respect of all participants, can have an important role to play. By stressing the importance and clear need for transparency of the process, etc., they can provide the intellectual firepower and local expertise to

ensure cultural sensitivity and applicability of the primary concept to the given country, demonstrating in so doing that it is more than a mere transplant from the U.S. Also, because they have the respect of all participants they can reduce charges of political one-ups-manship of one party over another. They give the process broader legitimacy and can act as advocates of the democratic nature of the primary without worrying about more specific political concerns such as who is going to win. In Bulgaria, the Center for Liberal Strategies and the Center for Social Practices played such a role.

**Financial resources.**

Running an election, especially a private one, is not cheap. Financial resources, both hard cash and in-kind contributions, must be readily available for the election to be held properly. During the course of the negotiations, the financial issue should be discussed early and often as having an agreement on paper is meaningless without the resources to implement the election itself. In Bulgaria, financial aid came from the international community, the participating parties/coalitions themselves, and, to a much lesser extent, the government.

**Political will.**

Ultimately, the primary process rests on the will of the leadership of the participating parties/coalitions. Unless these leaders are confident enough to sign their names to an agreement -- thus binding both themselves and their parties to the election's outcome -- the primary cannot take place. In Bulgaria, the leaders were brought into the process at a stage when the primary agreement had already been drafted, though many of the most important details had yet to be agreed upon. Not only was their involvement in these negotiations important, but their working relationship with each other was codified in the document as they composed the Political Council, the highest governing body of the primary agreement.

**Trained and/or experienced election workers.**

Building the election organization is perhaps the biggest challenge of the primary's implementation. Having a large pool of talent readily at hand is almost a necessity. Though training is an important component of this area -- as details for conducting a primary election might very well differ from a general election -- recruiting as many experienced workers -- at the national, regional, municipal and sectional levels -- as possible is key. In Bulgaria, there is a tradition of political party participation on electoral commissions so the thousands of people needed to conduct the elections were relatively easy to obtain. Even so, training still took some amount of time.

**Assistance from the government.**

At the very least, the government cannot impede the private, primary election. If it does, organizing and holding the elections becomes highly problematic, though not impossible. Hopefully, the government would actually aid the primary. In Bulgaria, the government was inconsistent, ultimately providing ballot boxes (though this was

in question until two weeks from election day) but failing to uniformly assist with polling sites, security, or other concerns.

### **Abiding by the results.**

The ultimate measure of the primary's success is the public and enduring unification of the participating parties/coalitions behind the single victorious candidate. A large turnout of voters with a decisive win by one of the candidates goes a long way to ensuring all will abide by the results. A non-partisan informational campaign can do much to both educate and attract voters. A recognition that the elections were relatively free of irregularities also assists in ensuring that the agreement holds.

Before the election was held in Bulgaria, several participants mentioned that a turnout of at least 10% would be necessary for them to accept the results, although this was not made an official part of the primary agreement. In the end, better than 40 percent of the opposition's electorate in the December 1995 parliamentary elections turned out. This fact coupled with the decisive victory of Stoyanov and the conclusion that the elections were run smoothly and fairly all contributed to the primary's ultimate success. The provision in the agreement stating that the party/coalition which supported the second place challenger would appoint the vice-presidential nominee reinforced the commitment level also.

### **Additional Factors.**

Two underlying factors must be figured into the whole, without which the primary process in Bulgaria would not have worked: 1) a certain level of **political maturity** which allowed the players to understand both the idealistic and reality-based reasons for the primary election and 2) a level of **trust** between the parties/coalitions and their leaders, most of which had to be built during the course of the process.

Bulgaria's primary was used to unite various factions around a single presidential candidate. In the United States, primaries are used in like manner, all for candidates in majoritarian races. Whether the primary concept can be modified to be used for proportional elections -- i.e. for parliament -- is uncertain though doubtful, given the varying motivations in those elections. Still, who would have thought that a primary election in Bulgaria would have been possible before it triumphed?

Finally, though the presidential primary election in Bulgaria was used as a means to unite several parties and coalitions behind a single candidate, there is no reason to think that it could not be used within a party or coalition which is experiencing factional difficulties. In fact, inter-party primaries might even be easier to create and conduct, as the UDF's variations on such have shown over the past year.

## **Appendices**

## **Appendix A: Timeline of Primary Process**

September 1995

- Initial discussions of achieving a joint presidential candidate.

November 1995

- President Zhelyu Zhelev announces his intentions to seek re-election.

December 1995

- IRI's President Lorne Craner, Eastern European Director Claire Sechler, and Bulgarian RPO meet with a host of political leaders to discuss the possibility of a primary.

January 11, 1996

- New Bulgaria Party supports Peter Stoyanov for president.

January 13, 1996

- The Concord for Bulgaria demand a joint presidential nominee through negotiations.

January 14, 1996

- The Concord for Bulgaria announce their support for Zhelev.

January 16, 1996

- Miroslav Sevlievski appointed campaign coordinator for Zhelev.

January 21, 1996

- First public mention of using national polls to decide upon single candidate.

January 22, 1996

- Zhelev meets UDF leaders for first time in months; presidential race not discussed.

January 25, 1996

- First Working Group meeting discusses general concept of primary elections.

January 30, 1996

- UDF NCC formally endorses the concept of primaries.

February 1, 1996

- Second meeting of the Working Group begins intensive discussion of how to adapt the primary concept to Bulgaria. Working Group begins meeting more frequently.

February 9-11, 1996

- IRI-sponsored conference on primaries in Bistritza.

February 15, 1996

- Kostov, Dogan, Moser, and Savov meet; announce no one is against the idea of a primary; People's Union begins to aggressively push national poll alternative.

February 19, 1996

- Revised draft primary agreement completed.

February 26, 1996

- Working Group presents primary agreement to Kostov; he endorses it and dismisses the poll idea.

February 27, 1996

- Working Group presents primary agreement to Savov and Moser; they ask that national poll be incorporated; Yordanov, Agov, and Stoyanov announced as three potential UDF candidates

February 28, 1996

- Working Group presents primary agreement to Dogan and MRF leadership; gains their support

March 6, 1996

- Working Group presents primary agreement to Zhelev; he commends their work.

March 12, 1996

- UDF NCC endorses primary agreement; authorizes Kostov to sign.

March 14, 1996

- Compromise reached on polling issue; IRI-funded poll testing the potential of a primary commences; results show overwhelming support.

March 22-23, 1996

- UDF and BANU hold national meetings; Stoyanov selected as candidate of UDF; Zhelev nominated as candidate of BANU; both groups also endorse primary.

March 29, 1996

- Kostov, Savov, Moser, and Dogan sign primary agreement.

March 30-31, 1996

- Democratic Party and Radical Democratic Party both endorse Zhelev; extraparliamentary parties and groups form loose coalition to support Zhelev.

April 9, 1996

- Stoyanov and Zhelev sign primary agreement, including a clause pledging tolerant campaigns.

Remainder of April

- Through the three primary committees, the parties work on organizing the primary election; Victory Foundation registered and begins raising money; CEC writes election rules and begins work on polling site distribution.

May 8, 1996

- Polling site placement difficulties intensify.

May 10, 1996

- Political Council approves distribution of polling sites and concepts and advertising firm for IRI-coordinated educational campaign.

May 15, 1996

- Intensive educational campaign begins.

Remainder of May

- Election materials distributed; election workers trained.

May 25, 1996

- King Simeon II returns to Bulgaria after 50 years in exile; greeted by joyous crowds; says nothing about political situation.

May 29, 1996

- Final pre-primary Political Council meeting answers last minute questions; all appears ready.

June 1, 1996

- Election day; 855,000 Bulgarians go to the polls in first primary elections ever held in Europe.

June 2-3, 1996

- While unofficial results show Stoyanov has won with a landslide, official vote tallying continues.

June 4, 1996

- Political Council releases official results and announces Stoyanov the victor and candidate of the joint opposition; Zhelev accepts results and promises to back Stoyanov's campaign for president.

## **Appendix B: The Primary Agreement**

The Union of Democratic Forces, the Peoples Union - the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union, and the Democratic Party -, and the Movement for Rights and Freedom guided by their joint purpose of winning the presidential elections have reached an accord:

1. To nominate a joint candidate for the presidential elections in Bulgaria through the process of primary elections.
2. To support the nominee who wins the primaries and not to nominate or support other candidates in the presidential elections.
3. The primary elections will be carried out according to Rules which comprise an inseparable part of the current Agreement.
4. The Agreement is open to all parties and coalitions of the democratic opposition.
5. The primary elections will be held on Saturday, June 1st, 1996.

Signed :

for UDF  
Ivan Kostov

for PU (BANU, DP)  
A. Moser, S. Savov

for MRF  
A. Dogan

### **REGULATIONS ON THE PROCEDURE OF THE PRIMARY ELECTIONS FOR NOMINATING A JOINT OPPOSITION PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE**

The primaries will be based on an agreement, referred to hereafter as the AGREEMENT, signed by the opposition parliamentary parties and coalitions - the UDF, the PU, and the MRF. The AGREEMENT will be signed by the chairpersons of these parties and coalitions after an accord has been reached on the following rules referred to hereafter as the RULES which pertain to the procedure of nominating a joint candidate for the opposition.

Extra-parliamentary parties can join the AGREEMENT as well, provided they accept the conditions stipulated in it. They can join by signing annexes to the agreement.

Each party and coalition which joins the AGREEMENT will declare that in the presidential elections it will support the opposition candidate who wins the primaries and will neither nominate nor support other candidates.

Each party or coalition which has signed the AGREEMENT is committed to carrying out a tolerant and fair campaign.

Each candidate running in the primaries will sign the AGREEMENT thus declaring that he/she will not run in the presidential elections unless selected to do so in the opposition primary elections.

## **1. Nomination of candidates for the primaries**

- A. Each parliamentary party or coalition joining the AGREEMENT can nominate a candidate to run in the primaries. The party or coalition determines itself the procedure for selecting its candidate.
- B. Extra-parliamentary parties which meet the following conditions can also nominate candidates :
  - a. those who received more than 1% of the valid ballots in the 1994 parliamentary elections, either on their own or as members of a coalition;
  - b. those who have not been members of BSP-dominated coalitions and have not supported the BSP in the 1994 parliamentary elections and in the 1995 municipal elections.

## **2. Administrative bodies responsible for the opposition presidential primaries for nominating a joint candidate**

- A. **POLITICAL COUNCIL** consists of 6 people, those being the chairpersons of the UDF, the PU and the MRF or of other people commissioned by the former. It is responsible for the following :
  - a. it signs annexes on matters which the AGREEMENT and the RULES on the primary fail to settle;
  - b. it approves the Board of the Foundation responsible for the primaries consisting of 6 members (2 from the UDF, 2 from the PU and 2 from the MRF). It approves the statutes of the Foundation;
  - c. it responds to appeals and arguments over the implementation of the RULES on the primary's procedure;
  - d. it conducts a joint education campaign among the citizens on the procedure of the primary;
  - e. it announces the results of the primary. The candidate who receives the greatest number of valid ballots wins the election;
  - f. it determines the conditions and the procedure of the election monitoring process;

The Political Council adopts all its decisions by consensus.

- B. **PRIMARY ELECTION COMMITTEES** are responsible for the technical aspects of the primary. All parliamentary parties and coalitions signatories to

the AGREEMENT are represented on an equal-quota basis. Non-partisan members can also be included here (renowned professionals or public figures) on the suggestion of the parties and coalitions.

- a. The Central Committee - it consists of 12 members. It appoints the technical assistants and experts who will take care of the technical preparation of the elections. The Central Committee will be set up at least 45 days prior to the election day. At its first seating it will adopt the rules regarding its activities and work out the instructions on the preparation and the carrying out of the primary election. The rulings of the Central Committee on technical or procedural issues are final. The debatable issues regarding the RULES, as well as appeals regarding the results of the primary will be submitted by the Central Committee to the Political Council, which will pronounce its ruling on those.
- b. Regional Committees - they consist of 6 members and are set up on the suggestion of the Central Committee after an approval has been given by the Political Council. There will be 31 regional committees.
- c. Sectional Committees - there will be one of these for each polling site. They consist of 3 or 6 members. They will be set up at least a week prior to the election day. They are in charge of the organization of the primary at the polling site they are responsible for.

All committees make decisions by consensus.

### **3. Funding of the primary election.**

The persons approved to be on the Board by the Political Council will register a Foundation immediately after the signing of the AGREEMENT. 60 days after the elections take place at the latest an international auditor will present an account for the activities of the Foundation, after which the Foundation ceases to exist.

### **4. Polling sites.**

The Political Council, acting on the suggestion of the Central Committee, determines where the polling sites will be located. With a view to providing maximum opportunity for the voters to cast their ballots in each municipality there will be one or several polling sites depending on the total number of voters (according to data provided by the last elections). The total number of polling sites will be 3000. The polling sites, their addresses and the name of the settlement they will be set up in will be announced by the Political Council at least 14 days prior to the elections and the media will make this information public.

### **5. Voters, who have the right to vote in the primary.**

Each voter who wishes to vote is entitled to participate in the primary upon presenting his/her passport with a valid registration from the police in the

settlement he or she lives in and on whose territory the polling site is situated.

**6. Voting process.**

- A. Each voter is entitled to just one vote.
- B. The voters can only vote at the polling site corresponding to their address registration as indicated in their passport.
- C. The voting will take place on a non-working day. The ballots will be counted after the polls close. The sectional committee will prepare a three-copy tally sheet according to the instructions issued by the Central Committee.
- D. The polling sites open at 7a.m. and close at 9p.m.

**7. Announcing the results.**

Having received all the documents on the elections from the Central Committee, the Political Council announces the results of the primary. The members of the election committees are obliged to keep the results of the elections secret until their official announcement by the Political Council.

- 8. The political party or coalition** that nominated the candidate who ranked second in the primary will nominate the vice-presidential candidate.

## Appendix C: Election Results by Region

### BULGARIAN NATIONAL PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY Saturday, June 1, 1996

Code	Region	Votes Cast*	Zheylu Zhelev	Peter Stoyanov	Zhelev (%)	Stoyanov (%)
1	Blagoevgrad	30,586	10,904	19,682	35.65%	64.35%
2	Bourgas	40,228	21,978	18,250	54.63%	45.37%
3	Varna	54,566	19,416	35,150	35.58%	64.42%
4	Veliko Turnovo	24,193	8,836	15,357	36.52%	63.48%
5	Vidin	10,659	3,008	7,651	28.22%	71.78%
6	Vratza	16,619	5,146	11,473	30.96%	69.04%
7	Gabrovo	16,003	4,826	11,177	30.16%	69.84%
8	Dobrich	15,349	6,274	9,075	40.88%	59.12%
9	Kurdjali	22,020	18,756	3,264	85.18%	14.82%
10	Kyustendil	14,805	3,052	11,753	20.61%	79.39%
11	Lovetch	18,150	5,335	12,815	29.39%	70.61%
12	Montana	9,023	2,660	6,363	29.48%	70.52%
13	Pazardjik	27,806	9,920	17,886	35.68%	64.32%
14	Pernik	11,663	2,521	9,142	21.62%	78.38%
15	Pleven	29,739	9,606	20,133	32.30%	67.70%
16	Plovdiv	59,036	8,930	50,106	15.13%	84.87%
17	Plovdiv-district	45,400	11,851	33,549	26.10%	73.90%
18	Razgrad	15,472	10,051	5,421	64.96%	35.04%
19	Russe	25,183	10,375	14,808	41.20%	58.80%
20	Silistra	14,833	11,663	3,170	78.63%	21.37%
21	Sliven	16,803	7,470	9,333	44.46%	55.54%
22	Smolyan	11,485	4,793	6,692	41.73%	58.27%
23	Sofia - I	78,558	15,074	63,484	19.19%	80.81%
24	Sofia - II	68,821	13,437	55,384	19.52%	80.48%
25	Sofia - III	49,994	9,978	40,016	19.96%	80.04%
26	Sofia - district	19,122	4,680	14,442	24.47%	75.53%
27	Stara Zagora	40,671	14,089	26,582	34.64%	65.36%
28	Turgovishste	11,377	8,109	3,268	71.28%	28.72%
29	Haskovo	19,657	8,115	11,542	41.28%	58.72%
30	Shumen	21,261	15,813	5,448	74.38%	25.62%
31	Jambol	12,412	4,987	7,425	40.18%	59.82%

<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>851,494</b>	<b>291,653</b>	<b>559,841</b>	<b>34.25%</b>	<b>65.75%</b>
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\* Total valid votes cast; the total number of votes cast in the election was 858,560.

Source: *Opposition Presidential Primary Central Election Commission, June 30, 1996*