

state, makes the cold warriors and the colonial powers uneasy.

If the British are unhappy with the BJP because it may prevent them from making a fresh bid to loot India in the wake of economic liberalization and globalization, the Anti-Defamation League-linked Abe Rosenthal's outburst against the BJP in the *New York Times* was indicative of the hatred that the liberal establishment is capable of spreading. Equating the BJP moderates with the German SS, Rosenthal said that "these people [the BJP] are Hindu-first and Hindu-only—which would wipe out the concept of unity between the Hindu majority of 700 million and the Muslim minority of 120 million and Christians and Sikhs." Rosenthal warned that the electorate's verdict leads to the dangers to Indian nationhood and the possibility that "Indian civil society could again become Indian civil war."

But those who will indulge in such chaos-mongering should realize that the electorate, which has steadily eliminated the Congress Party from the populous Ganga Valley—the Congress Party having secured only 16 of the 179 national parliamentary seats that represent Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and West Bengal—may be ready to politically eliminate those who will promote chaos and instability. They have voted for political stability, and not against economic reforms, and they see in the BJP, the largest and the only growing party, the party that can provide stability.

Turbulence ahead for Romania, Bulgaria

by Konstantin George

If there is no break in the shock therapy policies of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), a crisis with potential strategic ramifications is set to sweep Bulgaria and Romania this autumn, when Presidential elections are scheduled in the former, and both Presidential and parliamentary elections in the latter. The first storms were visible in the Bulgarian Presidential primary and the Romanian nationwide municipal elections, both held on June 2.

Bulgaria: Who will oppose the IMF?

In Bulgaria, a pauperized and angry electorate gave incumbent President Zhelyu Zhelyev the boot in a primary vote that determined who in the United Democratic Front (UDF) would be its Presidential candidate in the autumn elections. Zhelyev was trounced, receiving only 34% of the vote, losing to the 44-year-old relatively unknown lawyer, Petar Stoyanov, who got 66%. The reason behind Zhelyev's debacle is not hard to find. He is one of the main people responsible for the destruction of Bulgarian living standards under six years of IMF-imposed "reforms."

The UDF is the main opposition party to the current government of the ex-communists, called the Bulgarian Socialist Party. The UDF had formed Bulgaria's first post-communist government. It discredited itself in the first phase of shock therapy implementation, and thus, as in so many other cases in eastern Europe, set the stage for the return of the former communists to power. Given the different schedules for parliamentary and Presidential elections, Bulgaria has a BSP government with an absolute majority in parliament, and a UDF President.

Ironically, the UDF, with its new candidate, Stoyanov, could very well win the Presidential election. Bulgaria has been no exception to the rule that wherever the former communists were returned to power in eastern Europe, based on a popular backlash against the "reforms," the ex-communists, once in power, proceeded to pursue and even to accelerate the very same IMF policies. The BSP regime of Prime Minister Zhan Videnov, during this year, has implemented the most draconian austerity measures to date. This has been done in accordance with conditions set by the IMF for Bulgaria to receive a standby loan and thus prevent, or paper over, an imminent state bankruptcy.

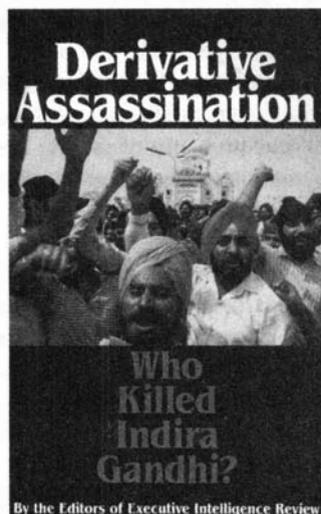
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The latest austerity measures were passed at the end of May. The value-added tax (VAT) was increased from 18% to 22%, and fuel prices were raised by 80%. New import taxes were set, adding to the already steep rise in the price for anything imported, caused by this year's collapse of the national currency, the leva. Protests in the streets of the capital, Sofia, by thousands of trade unionists and pensioners, are now commonplace. The desperation of the population and the discrediting of parties and institutions, were most strikingly demonstrated in the huge welcome that over 100,000 people accorded to Simeon II, the former king of Bulgaria, who returned to Sofia in May after 50 years of exile.

On top of the latest inflationary collapse of living standards, critical items are now in short supply. There are severe shortages of bread and gasoline. Rallies, often addressed by Stoyanov, regularly demand that the government resign and new elections be held. His message is: "Bulgaria is at the brink of a catastrophe. There is no hope, no fuel, no bread." All three of Bulgaria's opposition parties, the UDF, the People's Union, and the party of the Turkish minority, the Movement for Rights and Freedoms, have called for a vote of no confidence against the BSP government the week of June 10. The BSP will survive this round, having an absolute majority in the parliament. However, no institution committed to IMF policies can survive the turbulence to come during the second half of the year.

Romania: chaos and confusion

Romania on June 2 held the first round of its first nationwide municipal elections in four years, and the results can be described as chaos and confusion. (These elections were only the first round, so a full evaluation will only be possible after the June 16 run-offs.)

The results are unknown in more than two-thirds of the country's municipalities, including most of Romania's major cities. In more than one-third of the municipalities, the first round will have to be repeated, as fewer than 50% of the voters took part. In another one-third of the municipalities, including the capital, Bucharest, a run-off vote was scheduled for June 16.

What did clearly emerge, was a strong vote against the ruling Party of Social Democracy (PDSR) of Ion Illiescu, the former "reform" communist who took over from deposed dictator Nicolae Ceausescu in December 1989. His party has ruled Romania ever since. Their spectacular bid to capture the Bucharest mayoralty by running former tennis superstar Ilie Nastase as their candidate, flopped in the first round. Nastase trailed behind Victor Ciorbea, candidate of the main moderate opposition party alliance, the Democratic Convention, led by Emil Constantinescu, who is a Presidential candidate for the coming elections. Barring fraud and voting irregularities (which in Romania are quite common), Nastase will probably go down to defeat on June 16.

Otherwise, the PDSR failed to capture any major city, except for Galati, in the first round. In Romania, as in Bulgaria, there has also been a process of discreditation of most of the parties and institutions associated with post-communist parliamentary democracy. Beyond the very low voter turnout, another indication of this was the very good results achieved by extreme nationalist/fascist figures, such as Gheorghe Funar, a ferociously anti-Hungarian demagogue, who won the mayoralty of the Transylvanian city of Cluj on the first round, with 50.7%.

As can be seen from the events and results thus far in Bulgaria and Romania, the former communist part of the eastern Balkans is moving rapidly into a political phase change. Unless Western governments, led by the United States, move to free these countries from the shackles of IMF shock therapy, and serious development projects are instituted, these countries are programmed to repeat the Balkans' experience of the last Great Depression, when fragile and unstable "democracies," under brutalization of the conditions of life, fell like nine-pins. They were replaced by fascist dictatorships, each characterized by demagogic nationalism, including oppression of ethnic minorities and irredentism.

The potentials for more "Yugoslavias" are lurking, months or a few years down the road.



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