

BULGARIA

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Municipal Election Report

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THE 1995 MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS IN BULGARIA

Introduction:

The municipal elections in October and November of 1995 produced a series of firsts in Bulgarian politics that presented the pro-democratic parties with a number of challenges. These local elections were the first to be held independent of parliamentary elections and were therefore, the first "real" elections concerned with local governmental power. They were the first elections to be held after the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) -- the former communist party -- was swept back to power in the parliamentary elections in December 1994 and were therefore at least a partial referendum on the BSP's government.

They were also the first to test the Union of Democratic Forces' (UDF) newly established local organizations that had long been advocated by the International Republican Institute (IRI), but only established in the spring of 1995. Finally, the elections were the first to gauge the electoral viability of a number of non-socialist parties and coalitions, including the People's Union (PU) that formed shortly before last December's elections as a centrist alternative to the UDF. Each of these firsts, combined with abrupt changes in the electoral law just two months before the elections, contributed to the unique nature of Bulgaria's local elections, and all created fresh problems for the opposition.

Given the pre-election environment described above, IRI determined that the most efficient and effective way to focus its programming was to target a limited number of major cities. In choosing target cities, IRI used several criteria: the size of the city, the prospect that a jointly-supported candidate could emerge among the fragmented opposition in the mayoral elections, and, wherever possible, overlap with those cities where USAID resources were already concentrated. In addition to the targeted cities, IRI also trained various party activists in municipalities where, according to the respective party leadership, the training would have a

substantial impact. This seemingly limited scope was designed to allow IRI to build trust with the pro-democracy activists as well as implement a progressive educational program, beginning with the basics and working toward more technical and specific areas of a campaign. By election day, nearly 1,000 candidates (both mayoral and council), campaign managers, and activists had received IRI training.

Training focused on tailoring campaign organization, message development, and effective direct voter contact to a local election context. For this reason, IRI programming corresponded with the election cycle and was divided into four time-oriented segments. First, IRI's Sofia-based Resident Program Officers (RPOs) met with local party leaders in the targeted cities and trained their activists in campaign planning and organization. This segment culminated in a "training of trainers" conference where those expected to manage campaigns were brought together to hear details on organization, message, and the recruitment and motivation of volunteers for such activities as door-to-door campaigning.

The RPOs then trained candidates and campaign managers on communicating within the campaign organization and with the public. Message development and how to convey it were also emphasized. This segment, which continued until the official campaign period began 30 days before the election, culminated in a conference for candidates and their campaign managers with U.S. trainers.

Third, in the cities where joint candidates were ultimately selected, the RPOs worked with the campaign organizations on maintaining good communication within the coalition and methods of training volunteers from different parties to work together toward a common end. Finally, in the month before the campaign officially began, the RPOs conducted a final round of seminars in each of the targeted cities emphasizing the importance of direct voter contact programs. These final seminars were held at the invitation of the campaign managers and the individual candidates.

In the end, as local elections require, IRI used a rifle rather than a shot-gun approach to the elections and although the overall results were not all that the pro-democratic opposition hoped for, the training had clear and, in some cases, dramatic results. In two rounds of voting, the BSP won 76 percent of all municipal mayoral races in the country with a lower than expected turnout of 54 percent nationwide. A total of 195 municipalities are in BSP administrative control as opposed to 42 for the parliamentary opposition parties. Eighteen were won by independent candidates and minor parties.

What the general results obscure, however, is the effectiveness of IRI local training in particular cities. IRI-targeted cities had an average voter turn out of 58.5 percent, 4.5 percent higher than the rest of the country. In non-IRI targeted cities, a sampling shows that, on average, the BSP mayoral candidates took 47 percent of the vote, and the opposition received 27 percent. In IRI-targeted cities, meanwhile, the BSP's average vote was 36 percent with the democratic opposition landing 37 percent. In fact, of municipalities over 25,000 people, only those where the opposition received some form of IRI training, did they win. Moreover, even in the municipalities that received IRI training but lost, the margin of victory for BSP candidates is much lower than for the rest of the country, e.g. a 3.6 percent spread in Pleven as opposed to a 17.2 percent margin in neighboring Vratsa or a 20 percent difference in next door Lovech. Additionally, in some of those places the opposition won enough of a percentage to have a majority in the council even though they lost the mayor's race. (See The Local Races section for details.)

What complicates the analyses of these elections, however, is the same thing that made the elections themselves so difficult for the national party leadership: they were local. More than 100 local coalitions, each with its own particular logic, registered at the national level for the elections. The coalitions spanned the political spectrum and were, for the most part, marriages of convenience, demonstrating a rainbow of regional, ethnic, and other demographic differences that makes it difficult to reach general conclusions. In some places, independents ran for election supported by one or another coalition. In others, two "joint oppositions" supported different

candidates. In some municipalities, the Monarchist parties were very strong because they had well-known local candidates. Wherever the Movement for Rights and Freedom won, the ethnic dominance of the Turks is a certain corollary.

In any case, it can be stated unequivocally that the local elections in 1995 should be seen as a beginning and not as an end of the life of pro-democratic parties in Bulgaria. The parties of the opposition clearly have learned a great deal, although the lessons have been learned painfully. For this reason, the IRI remains committed to working with the pro-democratic parties in the future and sees the results of these elections as encouragement to continue doing so.

Local Elections: The Problems

Going into these elections the pro-democratic parties confronted four major problems:

- 1) Conception: No one had ever run municipal elections before and, as a result, discussion of local campaigns that focused on local issues was a difficult concept to assimilate.
- 2) Organization: Few of the parties had strong enough grassroots structures to carry out the campaigns, and even fewer had candidates to field. Even where the pro-democratic parties had both structures and candidates, they had extremely limited resources.
- 3) Expectations: The pro-democratic parties that controlled the municipalities for four years had done little during that time to convey their successes to the people, making it exceedingly difficult to overcome the building sense within the electorate that the BSP was going to win the local elections easily. For this reason, the parties rejected their incumbents, which created a host of campaign related problems (discussed below).
- 4) The electoral law: Amendments passed just two months before to the official launch of the campaign created a good deal of confusion and were easily used by the BSP-dominated media to

throw the opposition parties off balance. The new law also contributed, at least in part, to the lower than expected turnout and a relatively high percentage of invalid ballots because a number of changes made it more difficult for the average voter to easily participate.

Conception: local versus national elections

According to former U.S. Speaker of the House Thomas "Tip" O'Neil, "all politics is local" and without local politics, one cannot create the proper foundation for broader, national endeavors. This truism of American politics was not immediately evident to the pro-democratic political parties in Bulgaria, however, that inherited both a centralized system of government and a party system that reflects this centralized structure. Parties are still hierarchical and based more on personality than on political or social issues.

This contributed to one of the more intractable problems within the political parties. They needed to be convinced, at both the national and the local levels, that they were not fighting the December parliamentary elections all over again. Only after a good deal of time did those with whom the IRI worked come to realize the importance of tailoring local messages to local circumstances. Instead, they initially ignored such staples of local elections as canvassing, boosting name recognition, etc., in favor of crafting finely honed political platforms that no one would read.

The overall problem of how the local elections were perceived at the national level can be demonstrated in an anecdote. From the end of spring until late August, the national leadership of the respective parties attempted to negotiate and sign agreements stipulating that they would agree among themselves to support only joint candidates for mayor subject to case-by-case negotiation at the national level. This type of negotiation, while laudatory in intent, created confusion and even resentment at the municipal levels where, in many cases, local party leaders had already negotiated local agreements with people they had known for years. The fact that these local agreements could be overturned in some way by the national leadership demonstrated a marked misunderstanding as to who knows best what local needs are and, in the end, caused a

number of municipalities to unnecessarily fall to the BSP.

Eventually, those with whom IRI worked were convinced that local campaigns should be centered around local problems solved locally. Slogans, posters, and brochures were designed to make the most of this new focus, and local leaders were given ostensible control of all aspects of the campaign. In many places, however, candidate selection was carried out in such a way that it undermined the local campaign strategy because candidates were not properly seen as the prime deliverer of the message. Instead, they were chosen not because of their ability to communicate with the local citizenry but because they were the respective heads of the local party chapters. In some cases, these local party leaders were also good candidates. In many more, unfortunately, they were not.

Organization: lack of local structures

For years in its work with the various pro-democratic political parties, IRI has argued for the creation of local, formal party structures responsible for specified tasks in assigned geographical areas. Until relatively recently, however, the establishment of such structures was resisted largely out of fear among the smaller coalition-member parties that they would be shown to be exceedingly weak. This resulted in even the larger democratic parties depending on ad hoc groups of volunteers to implement rudimentary party functions. The UDF in particular relied on the fragmented organization of its 16 constituent parties to carry out party directives with little coordination and almost no accountability. In the spring of 1995, however, the UDF chose new leadership, re-constituted its governing body, and insisted on the creation of explicit UDF local organizations separate from the individual parties within the Union. Moreover, the UDF suggested that the first task of these new local organizations should be canvassing of their respective neighborhoods and the selection of candidates both for council and for mayor.

Needless to say, this was a Herculean task carried out in a tremendously compressed period of time. By May, all of the new UDF organization had been established. By June, almost all had begun their candidate selection process, and by August all but a few had completed it. As

would be expected, the process was not always a smooth one, and the national leadership could not resist the temptation of stepping in to impose certain, usually unpopular, decisions from time to time. Nonetheless, the UDF deserves a great deal of credit for moving its coalition in this direction.

Most of the smaller, non-parliamentary parties simply did not plan ahead nor did they have the resources to construct municipal organizations. Those that did faced a different problem, however -- the inability to field candidates. The notion that a viable political party cannot field candidates seems essentially contradictory and proved one of the abiding problems in negotiations at both the national and the local levels when it came to mayoral races for parties of all sizes. How could a party not have the wherewithal to find within itself candidates of a caliber to stand for a city's highest office? If it could not, why should it support someone else's candidate? Would this not be an explicit statement of impotence? Furthermore, how do you get people to work for you, i.e. build new elements of organization, without candidates to work for? These legitimate questions proved largely intractable, and the inability of the PU and the UDF to answer them led to the collapse of myriad agreements to support joint candidates across the country. Clearly, had it not been for the proportional system of representation in the municipal council, with no threshold for entrance, many of the smaller parties would have been unable to stand for local elections at all.

Expectations: the fear of incumbency

For the most part, incumbency in the U.S. provides a number of advantages going into a local election, high name identification being among the most important. In Bulgaria, however, it was decided early on at the national level that incumbency would be an Achille's heel. In most municipalities, the mayors unfortunately failed to realize that in politics there is no relationship between running for election and actually being mayor. Bulgarian mayors, once elected, simply forgot about their constituencies and went on about the business of running the municipality. Only a few held town hall meetings during their four-year terms. Fewer held press conferences or periodic updates for their citizens. In the meantime, despite various accomplishments, the

mayors accumulated negatives that went unchallenged. By the time the issue of candidate selection came up, many mayors who wanted to run again found themselves unable to do so because they had created no local constituency to support them against the party's general desire to find a fresh face. As a result, incumbents were casually cast aside. In fact, in only three significant municipalities did UDF mayors seek re-election. Although this tactic and the logic behind it can be questioned (in the end, all incumbents won), the decision to follow it created additional problems for the opposition. Not only did the pro-democratic parties need to defend their past mayors' records, but they had to do so while repudiating the mayors themselves.

This was a problem not only for the would-be second termers, but also for the parties themselves. Deciding to replace the incumbents meant selecting new candidates. It also meant educating the electorate both about the new faces and why they were preferable to officeholders they had supported during the past four years. In many cases, selecting the new candidate proved extremely divisive and created bitterness between various factions within the different coalitions and even caused individual parties to split at the local level. Of course, such divisions were usually played out in public, much to the disgust of the electorate that saw even less reason to support the pro-democratic parties for a second time.

Despite the difficulties of selecting new candidates, the high expectation among the electorate that the BSP was going to win the elections, no matter what the democratic parties managed to throw together, encouraged the pro-democratic parties to drop their incumbents. In short, the pro-democratic parties felt they had nothing to lose in trying to create enthusiasm by choosing someone new, even if they had nothing concrete to gain. Polls sponsored by IRI show that even among those inclined to vote for the opposition, some 60 percent believed the BSP was going to win. This tremendous pessimism was at the root of the lower turnout, especially among younger voters in the 18-35 age group. The pro-democratic parties simply could not create the expectation that they could win, and so they did not. For the BSP, the situation was precisely the opposite. Nothing succeeds like success and the former communists sought to make the best of the momentum they had gained in last December's parliamentary elections.

The electoral law

After holding onto a draft bill for months, the BSP-dominated parliament passed a comprehensive amendment to the electoral law in late July on the last day before summer recess.

Although a number of provisions within the bill were appealed to the Constitutional Court and ultimately struck down, these provisions did not greatly impact the political parties. More problematic for the pro-democratic parties were a number of manipulations of the law that did not allow enough time for education and training of activists and the broader electorate:

1. The ballots: In the past, ballots were color coded to correspond to each party (e.g. red for the Socialists). Ballots for the municipal elections were to be white, varying only in size, and bearing the name of the candidate, a registration number, and the name of the party or coalition (if any) supporting said candidate. This bleaching of the ballots eliminated a traditional tactic of telling the voters to "Vote Blue!" (UDF) or "Vote Orange!" (BANU).

2. Additional offices: Mayors in small towns and villages within a municipality (mayoralities) had in the past been appointed by the municipal mayor. The new law transferred the selection of these officials to the voters. Also, the three largest cities were subdivided into regions that would elect not only a mayor but also a council. While outwardly democratic, this second change proved equally confusing to the electorate. For instance, when asked two days before the election if she were voting for X, where X was a candidate for her mayoralty, a well educated professional woman responded, "No, I'm voting for Y," where Y was a candidate for municipal mayor. Under the law she had the right to vote for both.

This lack of clarity could have been combatted easily had the parties been given enough time to educate their supporters or if the national media had acted to address the issue during the campaign. As it happened, however, little time was given to clarifying these issues, resulting in a larger percentage of invalid ballots than in past elections with 13 percent being tossed out.

The two provisions of the electoral law presented above are problems merely of a technical nature. The decision to allow the top three vote getters to compete in the second round, however, is more insidious. The inclusion of this provision clearly indicates how well the BSP knows its pro-democratic opponents because it was done to encourage division among the various parties of the opposition. It largely succeeded, at least in the first round. After the adoption of the law, agreements between local parties to support just one mayoral candidate collapsed across the country as the possibility of having their own candidate to support in the first round proved too powerful a temptation for the local parties to resist. These agreements may have broken down in any case, but including such a provision in the law made it a lot easier to walk away from the negotiating table. This was especially the case since the parties could do so while solemnly stating they were not dividing the opposition but would throw their support to the opposition candidate who received the most votes in the second round, as if doing so was something mechanical.

If the second round machination was not enough to achieve its desired end, the BSP included a second tool of division in its electoral law tool chest. This was a provision allowing the mayor's name to top the council list. This provision allowed two things to take place. First, if the mayoral candidate was popular, this would boost name identification for the party list and, hopefully, its results as well. Second, if the mayoral candidate did not win the mayor's race, he most certainly would win election into the municipal council. The provision's practical pre-election effect, however, was to again throw a monkey wrench into the intra-party negotiations over who would be their collective joint candidate. If, for instance, the UDF candidate was chosen as THE joint candidate, his name could top the UDF council list. If all of the other parties actively encouraged their supporters to vote for that candidate they risked asking them to vote for the UDF council list as well. It's not clear how many negotiations unraveled over this point, but it certainly had an impact.

Objectives and Strategies of the Major Parties:

The Bulgarian Social Party (BSP) and coalition:

The BSP has been described accurately by democratic political commentators as an old party with a new face. With a younger, more energetic leadership epitomized in its leader and Prime Minister, 36 year old Jean Videnov, the BSP managed to convince the electorate in the December parliamentary elections that the reform implemented by the UDF was responsible for the country's hardships and, using populist language, promised to slow the pace of "change" and, in some instances, even reverse it.

These promises were eagerly accepted by a large percentage of Bulgaria's elderly population that had seen its pensions evaporate as prices steadily rose in 1991-1992. Such populist appeals also proved attractive to those connected with the new financial groupings in Bulgaria that maintain close contact with the BSP leadership. Although the BSP has not been able to fulfill many of its campaign promises since coming to power, its victory has ushered in an era of relative political stability that has been reassuring to the financial markets and to those fatigued by the vicissitudes of an economy in transition. Moreover, and much to the chagrin of the democratic opposition, the BSP has also been able to reap the fruits of the reform process including lower inflation, lower interest rates, and growth in the GDP that coincidentally accompanied the BSP return to power.

For the BSP, then, the local elections provided the perfect opportunity to solidify its renewed grip on power. Having an absolute majority in the Parliament, the BSP maintains a free hand in all aspects of national policy, sharing only a modicum of authority with the President in the area of foreign affairs. To be able to control the municipal layer of government as well would consolidate its gains and provide increased momentum for the presidential elections in late 1996.

In order to accomplish its objective, the BSP placed its faith in its superior organization to

get voters to the polls on election day and adopted a low-key approach to the elections hoping to depoliticize at least a portion of the electorate. The BSP first allowed the opposition to expend its energy in the quest for joint candidates, which as noted above, turned off many voters. Meanwhile, the BSP took its time selecting its own candidates. Only toward the very end of summer (and in some cases not until mid-September) did the party finally announce its nominees. When it did, it became clear that the BSP's desire to change its image in the larger municipalities was driving candidate selection. Rather than choosing old party apparatchiks, the party supported so-called independent candidates who were usually bankers or other professionals. The strategy was to demonstrate the party's maturity and willingness to support the "best" candidate regardless of party affiliation. In that way, BSP was able to take advantage both of the white ballots and the sense, as demonstrated by polls, that the populace was eager to vote for unaffiliated independents.

The BSP then relied on its superior financial resources, control of the media, and an existing grass-roots network of supporters to carry out that campaign which centered on the slogan, "The BSP -- The Constructive Power." The party used extensive word of mouth to intimate that if the voters in a given municipality chose a "blue" mayor (blue being the color of the main opposition parties), the "constructive power" of the BSP also could be used destructively. "Blue" municipalities could be isolated and denied needed resources.

This is not to say that the BSP party organization functioned like a well-oiled machine, incapable of making mistakes. First, the choice of bankers and other clear benefactors of reform conflicted with the party's traditional leftist stance and created a dichotomy in its electorate, typified by the comment that the BSP is now a party of "old red women and young red mobiphones." Second, the sheer dominance of the BSP in every sphere created tensions within the party at the local and national levels, elements of which are now jockeying for power and position. As a result, candidate selection was not always easy, especially in areas where the BSP maintained near absolute dominance. Third, the decision to postpone the announcement of candidates gave the opposition ample time to prepare their campaigns and start building name

recognition. Finally, the inability of the party to fulfill its December electoral promises disillusioned many of its supporters who no longer believed anybody could solve their problems.

Despite these difficulties, the BSP never lost its collective conviction that it was going to win everywhere, even in Sofia. In the end, the BSP won more than 70 percent of the mayoral races and captured 41 percent of the total vote in the council races. This represents a loss of 25 percent of the votes from the December 1994 parliamentary elections, but not enough to cause any loss of confidence in the BSP's ability to govern.

The Union of Democratic Forces (UDF):

The UDF's defeat in the December parliamentary elections provided some of the necessary impetus for a needed overhaul of the coalition. At its May National Party Congress, the UDF moved to expand its principal decision-making body, the National Coordinating Council, to make it more democratic. It also voted to replace the members of its executive council, as well as deciding to institutionalize its new local structures that had been organized during the two months before to the National Party Congress. Having reorganized itself, the UDF then proceeded to prioritize its objectives for the coming municipal elections.

These priorities were fairly straightforward and were enumerated in regional party conferences throughout May, June, and July. First, the UDF wanted to use the elections to build and test its new local structures with one eye on the 1996 presidential elections. Second, the UDF wanted to establish realistic electoral goals to test the local clubs without condemning them to oblivion in the event that they failed to win in some places. This "pragmatic realism" was epitomized by the party's leader, Ivan Kostav, who ostensibly sought victory everywhere but was satisfied when it became clear that Sofia, Plovdiv and Varna would remain "blue."

To achieve these objectives, the UDF pursued an internal policy of what might be termed "selective decentralization," which meant a decentralization of most decision-making authority to

the local clubs but almost no decentralization of party resources. On the positive side, local clubs were to select their own candidates in a form of municipal primary. This latter process, subject to a two-thirds veto of the National Coordinating Council, stood in marked contrast to the way the party had imposed candidates during the parliamentary elections. The party did ask the local clubs to follow a strict time line in which the "primaries" were to be completed by mid-July, and asked that they form their own coalitions for both mayoral and council races. On the negative side, local party elements were left to sink or swim in terms of fundraising.

Although the primary process implemented by the UDF had both its problems and its critics, it stands out as the most transparent system of candidate selection in all of Bulgaria. For good or ill, however, the process was designed in such a way that the head of the local UDF Municipal Coordinating Council (MCC) had a distinct advantage organizationally and was often selected as the UDF mayoral candidate. This was done intentionally to ensure that the party would retain control of their mayors once elected. Such lack of control had plagued the UDF as mayors elected in 1991 quickly adopted policies that were out of line with broader coalition policy. This is not to say that the process yielded poor candidates -- they were not in most instances -- but there may have been better candidates that were overlooked due to their lack of party affiliation or credentials.

The UDF's overall decentralization policy was not without its contradictions and was often used as an excuse to avoid thorny political problems. For instance, by late June, the UDF leadership stated categorically that it would no longer negotiate national agreements between the various opposition parties because it had vested all authority at the local level, although in certain instances they felt justified in violating this authority (see Karlovo and Blagoevgrad below). Also, "decentralization" allowed the national leaders to refuse to give the local campaign organizations money, putting the responsibility for fund-raising squarely on the municipal organization.

Nonetheless, there were a number of crucial campaign elements that the national

leadership facilitated for the municipal organizations that required nation-wide coordination. Foremost among these was the registration of their respective local coalitions. This process was difficult, demanding, and time consuming. In the end, more than 90 percent of the UDF's local campaign organizations registered first -- a solid accomplishment of organization -- which allowed the use of the important number one ballot across the country. (Each registered party's ballot is numbered according to placement in each precinct. The number one position is generally more highly visible and thus, advantageous.) The national leadership also tried to bring some coherence to the individual UDF campaigns by producing and distributing thousands of posters and brochures that presented positive images and the slogan, "The UDF -- The Power of the Common People." Finally, the national leadership travelled tirelessly around the country to support UDF candidates and freed up significant resources for those candidates who survived the first round.

In conclusion, the UDF ran a fairly strong campaign despite the fact that it suffered from many of the earlier described problems. However, the rhetoric used by the national leadership continued to consist mainly of blustery anti-communism without a supplementary future-looking, positive, proactive message. More problematic, for both its effect during the campaign and its implications for the future, was the rhetoric used by the national UDF leaders when referring to the rest of the opposition. Statements were usually combative, condemning, and belittling. Attacks on the PU, for instance, often focused on the democratic credentials of the party, its candidates' commitment to the democratic ideal, or the coalition's relevance. This use of strong language was born out of the earnest and deeply held belief among many within the UDF that the undecided voters were unimportant to the UDF and that the only inroads the PU and other opposition parties could make would be by cutting into the Union's support. Attacking these parties, therefore, served to radicalize and motivate the hard-core "blue" supporter who was crucial to winning in such places as Sofia or Varna. In this, it has to be said, the UDF was successful, but at an extremely high cost. The UDF, in conjunction with the PU, won the mayor's office in only 16 municipalities, the majority of them quite small. Moreover, the Union managed to poison the atmosphere at the national level where attention turns next to the presidential

elections.

The People's Union (PU):

The People's Union, a coalition of two of Bulgaria's oldest traditional parties, the Agrarian Party (BANU) and the Democratic Party (DP), set out in the local elections to promote itself as the "rational choice," the slogan it used during the parliamentary election. The idea was to attract disillusioned UDF supporters and others by positioning itself as a "new center" in opposition to the bi-polar model that has emerged in Bulgarian politics. It was hoped that in this way the PU, which was created only months before the December 1994 parliamentary elections, could establish itself as a "real" political entity with a distinctive voice in Bulgarian politics.

Portraying itself as the rational choice meant demonstrating the party's willingness to unite the opposition, which it first attempted to do in a conciliatory fashion. The coalition was the driving force behind the flurry of spring negotiations that sought to forge national agreements to support common candidates for mayor. In most of these negotiations, the PU offered to support UDF mayoral candidates in exchange for explicit agreements of UDF support for PU deputy mayors or council presidents when, and if, the elections were won. Where the PU was obviously stronger, the coalition offered the same deal in reverse. These negotiations proved unfruitful, however, and came to an abrupt halt after the electoral law was passed, for reasons noted above.

In this respect, the defining moment for the PU arrived when it decided to support as its candidate for mayor of Sofia the popular former Prime Minister, Mrs. Reneta Indjova. This decision had an immediate impact on the rest of the country where local negotiations immediately faltered. It soon became clear that at least two opposition candidates would face one another in the first round. What the PU hoped for in supporting its own candidate in Sofia was an Indjova-led breakthrough. In order to maintain the spirit of a united opposition, however, the PU continued to push for concrete agreements regarding the second round where it would be agreed that the opposition candidate who received the fewer votes would drop out. Nevertheless,

the damage had been done and although such arrangements were ultimately agreed to, they were difficult to enforce and their impact in the elections remains questionable.

Once underway, the PU's national campaign was hampered by a number of factors, some related to simple bad luck and others to the inherent nature of the coalition itself. An example of the former occurred in July when the leader of the DP, Mr. Stefan Savov, suffered a serious heart attack, making it unclear whether he or someone else would continue to lead his party. Meanwhile, the head of BANU, Mrs. Anastasia Moser, was laid low by a different sort of ailment -- persistent and distracting challenges to her leadership from more conservative members of her party who resented her decision to support Indjova's candidacy. As late as one month before the campaign, in fact, the BANU leadership body met for the third time in less than three months in an attempt to oust Mrs. Moser -- this time while she was out of the country. They failed, but the energy expended on the issue clearly distracted campaign activists whose minds should have been focused elsewhere.

Another problem specific to the coalition is its demographic and ideological composition. The coalition between the DP and BANU, although in some ways mutually reinforcing, remains fragile and rather artificial. In time this may be overcome, but in the intensity of local elections, tensions between members of the respective parties at the local level grew, resulting in splits in a number of places. Where the division of labor could be easily divided between countryside villages and the inner city, problems were fewer; but even here stress arose, especially when it came time for the local coalitions to appoint poll observers that were paid positions.

Other more generic problems plagued the PU as well. The PU as a coalition was tremendously disorganized and was still conducting training seminars for its activists two weeks before election day. What national campaign there was stemmed almost exclusively from the events organized by and for Mrs. Moser and Mr. Savov. There was a chronic lack of money for literature development or posters and in some places there was a hesitancy to engage in direct voter contact as a way to make up for the lack of money. The candidates themselves were selected in long, laborious negotiations, though this generally resulted in the selection of

qualified nominees.

Despite these myriad problems, the PU accomplished what it set out to do. It nearly doubled its support in the local elections -- up from 6.6 percent in the December parliamentary elections to almost 12 percent. However, an IRI-sponsored poll taken just two weeks before the elections also showed that although people were ready to support the PU candidates locally, they were still not prepared to vote for the coalition in parliamentary elections. Nonetheless, the results the PU achieved can be built upon if the coalition survives the loss of Indjova in Sofia and works hard to consolidate its gains. It may gather momentum in the presidential elections. For the time being, the future of the PU remains too dependent on its national leaders although both Mrs. Moser and Mr. Savov are committed to making the PU a more developed political entity.

Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF):

Although a parliamentary party, the MRF is devoted to its ethnic Turkish origins and, in fact, relies solely on those voters for its success. There has been talk within certain local clubs of the MRF about efforts to expand its base, but they have yet to take any significant action to do so. During the local elections, they fell back upon their usual strategy -- motivate the ethnic Turks to vote for their candidates. There was, however, a variation in certain locales when the MRF worked with both the UDF and PU in coalition where the Turkish base was weaker -- and the UDF and PU worked in coalition with an ascendant MRF in the strongly ethnic regions. Following this strategy, the MRF achieved more electoral success than any other opposition party, winning the mayor's office in 26 municipalities. The MRF will remain a political force in ethnic Turkish regions and cannot be discounted in future elections, although the chances of broadening the party beyond its limited base remain remote.

The Smaller Parties:

In the past, the IRI has worked with numerous smaller parties believing that their continued viability was at least as important to the development of Bulgarian democracy as that of the larger, parliamentary parties. This work continued during the local elections, but for the

reasons outlined in the introduction, was necessarily circumscribed due to the lack of party candidates and organizations in many of the targeted municipalities. The situation was complicated by the decision by a number of the parties to support BSP candidates in some places or to join together and oppose a joint UDF-PU candidate (see the Russe campaign description below for an example).

The goals of these parties differed from the larger parties in that their campaigns were almost totally focused on winning municipal council seats. For this reason, it made more sense for the smaller parties to run a national style campaign because they were intent on trying to maintain the proportion of the vote they had won in the December 1994 parliamentary elections. To this end, they negotiated with everybody and anybody to get their candidates into electable positions on coalition lists and then organized their local organizations to support those lists. In places where they were particularly strong, they fielded their own list of candidates and, in some places, even supported their own mayoral candidates.

Although the nationwide results for the smaller parties have not yet been published, it is safe to assume that none succeeded in maintaining their December 1994 level of support. This is largely due to the nature of the majoritarian mayoral races that pitted former communists against parliamentary opposition party candidates in the more populous cities where most of the support for the smaller parties had come in the last elections. Would-be supporters of the smaller parties in the local elections did not want to “waste” their votes by voting for a candidate who had no chance of winning against the BSP candidate and so hesitantly voted for the PU or UDF candidate.

Despite the failure on the part of the smaller parties to duplicate their December 1994 results, most of the parties are content with the ways in which their local organizations functioned and are hopeful that in the next parliamentary elections they will be able to make a breakthrough. This is highly unlikely, however, given the fact that the next elections are presidential and will no doubt reinforce the majoritarian impulse. Additionally, should the BSP

win the presidential elections, the next parliamentary elections will again be a duel between the opposition writ large and the former communists, giving little political space for more marginal parties to fill. The following is a brief summary of the activities of the three more nationally relevant smaller parties: the Democratic Alliance for the Republic (DAR), Union New Choice (UNC), and the Bulgarian Business Block (BBB).

Democratic Alliance for the Republic (DAR):

In the December 1994 elections, the DAR coalition narrowly missed getting over the four percent threshold for entry into parliament. It accepted its results as a vindication of its center-left message, however, and seemed poised to consolidate its support in the local elections. Unfortunately, shortly after the parliamentary elections, differences emerged within the coalition as the leaders of its two largest members, the Bulgarian Social Democratic Party (BSDP) and Civic Alliance for the Republic (GOR), disagreed on the need for the coalition to become a single party and on which one of them would lead such a party. After months of bitter infighting, the coalition at the national level split in August following the decision of GOR to enter into coalition with the BSP in a number of key municipalities, including Sofia. After the split, the BSDP decided to run independently, managing to do relatively well in some larger municipalities. In places where the DAR coalition remained in tact, it too had some moderate success. Overall, however, it is difficult to say what the future of DAR or its constituent parties will be, despite the fact that the party leaders, especially GOR's Alexander Tomov, remain fairly popular, at least outside Sofia.

Union New Choice (UNC):

UNC is the party of Dimiter Ludgev, a former defense minister who left the UDF in 1992 to form his own party. Renamed after the December parliamentary elections (it had been called Center New Policy/New Choice), the UNC party portrays itself as the hope of liberal democracy in Bulgaria but is in reality an ad hoc mixture of intellectuals with no clear direction and fragmentary organization. The party, such as it is, tried throughout the local elections to build or consolidate its organization and in some smaller municipalities and mayoralities managed to win

a number of seats. Where it did so, however, it was due to the hard work of local activists and not because of any help they may have received from the national party that did not have a great deal of money. Until the party solidifies its organization, which it is perpetually in the process of doing, it will remain little more than a clique of intellectuals with only scattered pockets of support.

Bulgarian Business Block (BBB):

Although a parliamentary party, the BBB is included here as a smaller party because of its weak political structures and near total dependence on its charismatic if nationalistic leader, George Ganchev.

Many thought that the local elections would be the coup de gras for the BBB given Ganchev's ejection from the parliament earlier in the year and the incessant wrangling within his parliamentary group that ultimately collapsed during the summer. Surprisingly, the BBB managed to do relatively well, winning in some smaller places and coming in second in Pazardjik where it also won eight percent of the votes cast for council. Although it failed to duplicate its December parliamentary results, the BBB did well enough to erase the idea that it is merely a protest party. The future of the BBB, however, is still an open question because its ability to control its organization is questionable, especially given the division within its leadership and the unpredictability of Ganchev. In any case, it seems certain that Ganchev will again run for President in 1996 hoping to do better than the respectable 16 percent he managed to garner in 1992.

The Local Races:

As mentioned in the introduction, the poor overall results of the opposition parties, large and small alike, fail to indicate the dramatic progress the pro-democratic parties have achieved over the past six months. The UDF's decision to establish new local party organizations, the PU's doubling of support, and the crucial victories in Stara Zagora and Gabrovo each provide evidence of the incremental but important impact IRI has had on the political parties in Bulgaria.

As will be demonstrated shown, even where defeat was particularly disappointing, like in Sandanski or Veliko Turnovo, the results of the municipal elections were a marked improvement over the December 1994 results and indicate the degree to which the parties have begun to absorb and apply the training that the IRI has provided.

Generalizations, as noted earlier, do not adequately convey the ups and downs or the ins and outs of what actually took place during the local elections in Bulgaria. For this reason, what follows is a detailed narrative describing one of the crucial campaigns, that of Stara Zagora, a campaign which typifies how IRI training stimulated those who were willing to accept and try new ideas. The case study attempts to give a flavor of the challenges that faced the campaign, including internal squabbling, differences with the national parties, and technical difficulties, but also how IRI training helped to turn the tide. Following the Stara Zagora case study, a series of campaign summaries for the other nine IRI-targeted municipalities is presented.

A Tale of One City: Stara Zagora

Stara Zagora is the sixth largest city in Bulgaria and is located in the central part of the country, on the southern flank of the Sredna Gora Mountains. It is home to Zagorka beer, and is now home to one of the best organized local political organizations in the country.

Like many of the cities IRI targeted, Stara Zagora was a place where the political arithmetic gave a somewhat dubious indication of its future success. Forty-one percent of the electorate in Stara Zagora had voted for the BSP in the December parliamentary elections, and less than 30 percent voted for the UDF. Next came the PU that had managed to glean slightly less than 10 percent. Still, the incumbent mayor was a favorite of USAID and others and looked to be running again.

Unfortunately, as is usual in Bulgarian politics, things were not what they at first appeared. The incumbent, though popular with foreigners, had very little connection to his

constituency and spent a good deal of time in Sofia. He had done a lot for the city, but had done very little to convey his successes to the public at large. Furthermore, although he had been effective, he had also been too outspoken for many in the party and in the community and so had created a number of powerful enemies. For these reasons and others, he decided not to run again.

In addition, the prospect of having a joint candidate in Stara Zagora without him, which seemed reasonable on paper and from a distance, disappeared like a mirage almost immediately. The PU, which had done moderately well in the Stara Zagora region in the parliamentary elections, wanted to hold out for its own candidate, and political negotiations at the national level involving many of the higher ups in both the UDF and the PU gave some indication that the PU would ultimately have its way. Also, the MRF was being actively courted by the BSP, as was the BBB, while the smaller parties like UNC and DAR were also waiting to see which party or coalition would offer them the best deal before publicly committing themselves. Thankfully, rather than slipping away, the situation was saved by the tough bargaining skills of the head of the UDF there, a woman whose openness to new ideas and willingness to apply them foreshadowed the victory the pro-democratic forces would ultimately achieve.

By mid-July, after two IRI workshops there, the Stara Zagora opposition was united around the UDF candidate, a professor Tsanko Yablonski. Professor Yablonski had been selected with the support of the incumbent mayor in the UDF primary process and was a strong, if fairly unknown, candidate -- warm, smiling, a decent speaker, and, best of all, a person who knew what the local problems were and was willing to speak about them with individual voters. With his candidacy finally in place, the campaign team switched into active staging mode. Using organizational charts to track the coalition's flow of information and time-lines to coordinate events and momentum, (both techniques learned through IRI workshops), Yablonski's campaign team swung into action setting up mini-town hall meetings and small coffees with local professional groups, and they began to raise money. Despite all of this activity, IRI insisted that direct voter contact programs also be used. The campaign manager remained skeptical and was

especially concerned that any form of door-to-door campaign would alienate rather than attract voters. He would not use this tactic for this reason, and he would not use direct mail because it was too time consuming and "would not work." All of this was before the BSP candidate had been announced.

In mid-September, the BSP finally announced its candidate, Mr. Svetlozar Terziev. He was impressive. Well known in the town as a successful and wealthy businessman, Terziev was energetic, good-looking and a good speaker -- in many ways the perfect reflection of Yablonski and not only in looks and presentation. In message, too, they were very similar. Rather than dwell on differences between himself and Yablonski, the BSP candidate merely copied the opposition's positions and policies and said, "I can do it better," which many believed he could.

As a campaign tactic, the BSP team managed to duplicate every meeting Yablonski's team arranged. If Yablonski was meeting with the local doctors' association in the morning, for example, Terziev would meet with them in the afternoon. Moreover, Terziev's campaign team would invite Yablonski's manager to weekly discussions in an attempt to keep the whole affair friendly. All of this, of course, drove Yablonski's campaign manager to distraction as he was losing the ability to keep a clear distinction between his candidate and his opponent. What was worse, the tactic was working and Terziev was gaining momentum rapidly. The BSP-controlled local press even began to reinforce the impression that there was no difference between the two by simply asking who would be the more effective mayor, a businessman or a teacher.

With traditional campaign options rapidly dwindling, the campaign manager relented to trying door-to-door and other direct voter contact approaches, including factory visits. He even agreed to try direct mail to pensioners. In his mind, he had nothing to lose. If it worked, great. If it didn't, well, nothing else seemed to be working anyway. He decided that he would gather his volunteers together and assign them to different parts of the municipality. There were less than two weeks left, and he was having brochures developed and would distribute as many as he could in this way. Based on IRI workshop instructions, the campaign

manager brought together several hundred volunteers, presented the difficult situation before them, and then unveiled the countering strategy. Although at first hesitant, the volunteers followed his advice and began going door-to-door. Soon people were stopping the candidate in the street, telling him about his wonderful volunteers and saying that they were going to vote for him. The volunteers themselves were reporting back to the campaign headquarters that people were responding in a generally positive way and that the number of doors they were hitting was increasing incrementally. The campaign manager decided to expand the area to be contacted and even sent some hardened volunteers out to the gypsy neighborhoods where the UDF had never received more than five percent of the vote.

In the meantime, the details of the final week of the campaign were coming together. There were going to be a number of get-out-the-vote events for young people, a final rally with the national leadership of both the UDF and the PU, and a number of smaller events for the candidate. The campaign team was also to receive the results of a poll. When the results came in, they were distressing. What the poll showed was that the election was too close to call, with the candidates within the statistical margin of error of one another. The reason this was so distressing was because the campaign had decided to expend all of its resources in trying to win in the first round. If the election went to the second round, and they had to wait two weeks (half the official campaign period) before voting, they would lose their momentum and would have nothing with which to campaign. Out of last minute realism, the campaign manager took what little money the campaign had saved for radio and put it aside for the second round -- just in case.

A second round was indeed needed. The joint coalition candidate won by a narrow two percent margin but not the required 50 percent plus one to win outright. Worse, the BBB won three percent of the vote and announced that its candidate was withdrawing in favor of the BSP candidate. The situation looked grim, and *Duma*, the communist newspaper, confidently and gleefully predicted the fall of Stara Zagora in the second round. But Yablonski's campaign team had decided on a course of action. First of all, the campaign team convinced the Municipal

Election Commission to hold the second round one week, rather than two, after the first round, effectively cutting the length of the follow-up campaign in half. Second, as the campaign had little money left and very few posters, it decided to print cheap leaflets in which the candidate made a personal appeal to the voters, asking them not to allow the city to fall into BSP hands. It also decided to distribute them in an American style, intense three-day voter blitz, concentrated within the city itself. The blitz would climax at the end of the week with another large rally attended by the entire national leadership.

To hear the campaign manager describe it, that week was hell on earth. Although the Yablonski campaign did manage to take the BSP by surprise by moving the election day up a week, the BSP candidate and the BSP organization did not sit still. Every day, some member of the cabinet was there to campaign vociferously for Terziev. Prime Minister Jean Videnov spent the entire Friday before the elections in Stara Zagora, calling attention to the importance the BSP attached to the election. And yet, on that Sunday, Yablonski won with an incredible seven percent margin. What had happened?

According to the campaign manager, it was the blitz. On the Monday after the first round, the first possible day to campaign, more than 40,000 pieces of literature were picked up by volunteers and taken back to their assigned districts -- without prodding. By the end of the week, they had distributed another 50,000 pieces of the new leaflet across the city and had invited everybody they contacted on Friday to their rally -- which was twice as large as the one held before the first round. The final impact of the blitz was spectacular; in the city, where the blitz was focused, the coalition won more than 80 percent of the vote. Less important electorally, but even more indicative of the campaign's effectiveness, the UDF won 38 percent of the gypsy vote, an unprecedented accomplishment.

Stara Zagora on that day became a beacon of hope around the country where most campaigns were gearing up for the second round in a week's time. But, unfortunately, there was no way they could duplicate what Stara Zagora had accomplished, because what the UDF had

been able to do had not taken five days, but seven months. From the moment IRI started to work in Stara Zagora, the people whom IRI trained were inquisitive, eager to work, and well led. They were also insatiable once they saw something work. Even now, the new mayor and his team are looking to IRI for new ways of communicating to their constituency. The local UDF leadership, too, is looking to IRI to help focus and use effectively the new-found enthusiasm and confidence within its membership. Though the Stara Zagora results were not duplicated everywhere, shades of its victory permeate every city in which IRI worked.

Additional Campaign Summaries

Blagoevgrad

Blagoevgrad was perhaps *the* key city as far as the U.S. interests are concerned because of the presence of the American University in Bulgaria. However, the democratic campaign in Blagoevgrad was doomed almost from the start. The failure of the incumbent mayor to seek re-election and the failure of the UDF to encourage her to do so created a vacuum that proved exceedingly difficult to fill. Throughout the summer, IRI worked with council candidates who were selected early, but had to wait for inter and intra-party disagreements to end before working with the chosen mayoral candidate. As happened elsewhere, the division even within the UDF about who should be a candidate sapped the overall campaign of energy and enthusiasm. Finally in mid-September, just weeks before the campaign was to begin, the national leadership of the UDF stepped in decisively on the side of the sitting city manager, Mr. Ilyan Popov. The leadership's move, however, effectively divided the UDF, and a second opposition force supported the other UDF contender.

The failure of the UDF to come up with a single candidate served to encourage the other parties to support their own candidates and by election day, there were 15 running. This proved not only confusing to the electorate, but also undermined voter interest in the entire elections. Adding to the confusion was the split that took place in the PU over the position of council candidates on the PU list. Even when the UDF finally had its candidate, there was little time for

effective campaigning. The candidate had a weak message and asked one of the IRI RPOs the day before the campaign was to begin what his slogan should be. Posters were not developed until the final week of the campaign, and brochures were only produced after the first round. In the end, the poor organization and fragmentation of the opposition, rather than the strong campaign of the BSP, worked to frustrate the opposition's potential voters who simply did not vote. The victory for the BSP in Blagoevgrad was an important symbolic victory for the party and its leadership as they were reasonably sure they were going to lose there.

Gabrovo

Gabrovo was the first municipality in which IRI started its preparatory training for the municipal elections and demonstrates the difficulty when the opposition failed to unite. For this reason, despite the victory of the UDF there, Gabrovo is a story tinged by sadness.

IRI's first meeting in Gabrovo was with all of the pro-democratic opposition parties, including the incumbent mayor, Tzvetan Nanov, who had been very effective and was reasonably popular. Had the opposition supported him early on, he certainly would have won in the first round. The problem with Nanov was that, though elected by the UDF in 1991, he was a member of Savov's Democratic Party and had left the UDF when Savov did. For this reason, the UDF local organization was under pressure to come up with its own candidate, which it did in the person of Nicolai Datchev, an engineer and the president of a medium-size state enterprise. Both candidates received IRI training but when the opposition failed to unite in late August, IRI RPOs were forced to split their time between the two UDF and PU campaigns until the campaign began, after which IRI assistance ceased.

The UDF in Gabrovo had by far the better organized campaign and developed excellent posters and leaflets, distributing the latter door-to-door. However, they also attacked Nanov relentlessly and after the first round, in which the BSP candidate edged out both the UDF and the PU candidate, the negotiations for the second round proved exceedingly difficult. MPs from both parliamentary groups were dispatched to carry out the negotiations and with a week to go

before the second round, Nanov finally agreed to step out of the race. He did not go willingly, and he did not campaign actively for Datchev, however. In the end, therefore, what should have been a rout of the BSP turned into a victory of the narrowest margins for the UDF. Datchev won with less than 200 votes.

Karlovo

The story of Karlovo is also a tale of a disunited opposition, but with a twist. In Karlovo it was decided early on that the joint mayoral candidate would be the sitting Deputy Mayor, Hristo Hadjidimitrov, who was a member of BANU. Even when the UDF insisted that its local organizations submit to the primary process, Hajidimitrov was chosen. Despite this fact, internal rumblings within the regional and national leadership of the UDF prevented a joint campaign from proceeding, and Hajidimitrov was forced to campaign on his own. Then disaster struck. The day before the registration deadline, the Plovdiv regional leadership of UDF imposed a candidate on the local organization and with the support of one of the democratically oriented trade unions, managed to register him as the UDF candidate at the Central Election Commission. Having depended on UDF organization and resources, the PU candidate was devastated though continued to battle on. With almost no money in his campaign, his manager yielded to the logic of door-to-door campaigning to get his message out.

On election day, however, UDF supporters turned out for the UDF candidate who came in second behind the BSP candidate. Hajidimitrov came in a close third. During the negotiations for the second round, the local leadership of the UDF finally prevailed on their own candidate to step down, even though he had received more votes than Hajidimitrov, and the PU faced the BSP candidate alone. It was too late, however. Had they joined together at the start, the outcome may have been different, but there was no momentum in Hadjidimtrov's campaign, the UDF had no money or energy to work for him. The population as a whole was frustrated by the performance of the opposition. In this way, the opposition lost Karlovo.

Pazardjik

The opposition was in even greater disarray in this municipality. Despite an early willingness to participate in IRI workshops together in early June, the UDF and the PU were at one another's throats. At issue, again, was who should run for mayor. The Democratic Party had an incumbent mayor, deputy mayor, and council president, all of whom had been elected when they were still part of the UDF. For this reason, the DP thought its candidate, the incumbent deputy mayor, should be the joint candidate. The UDF strenuously disagreed, and following its primary process, introduced its own candidate, the local head of the UDF who was a weak candidate. When negotiations failed to yield a joint candidate, the PU and the UDF began baiting each other in public rather than attacking the BSP candidate. The results were predictable.

Contributing to the unfolding disaster was a split in the PU campaign organization. Two weeks before the campaign officially started, the entire DP contingent, except the party chairman, resigned. Although they ultimately returned a week after the campaign was underway, they did so on the condition that they only work for the mayoral candidate and not for the PU party list.

This, coupled with the bickering between the UDF and the PU, allowed the BBB candidate to come out of nowhere to siphon off a huge portion of their potential vote. His nonsense law and order message struck a chord with the Pazardjik electorate as did his chastisement of the other opposition parties for playing games. In the end, the dismal campaigns of both the UDF and the PU led to a sound trouncing in the first round. In the second round, the PU refused to vote for the UDF candidate who made it into the runoff, choosing to stay home instead. As a result, the UDF candidate received fewer votes than the BBB candidate, coming in third. The BSP candidate, who ran a good campaign, won easily with 49 percent of the votes cast.

Pleven

Pleven is one of the cities for which IRI had high hopes. The Pleven region is predominantly a "red" region, but it was believed that if the pro-democratic parties could come

together and run a strong campaign, they could win. The early signs were good. All the parties were willing to sit down and negotiate, and it seemed likely that an early selection of a joint mayoral candidate was possible. In this belief, IRI arranged a number of workshops that included the leadership from the parties likely to work together in the election.

When the PU decided to support Indjova in Sofia, however, the delicate coalition structure collapsed. Soon the PU was making rumblings that it wanted its own candidate. The UDF, too, was creating problems for itself by courting one of the more nationalistic parties, which eventually drove both the MRF and a number of smaller parties out of the coalition. Eventually, despite continued professions of good will, it was decided that time was running out and that the different parties would agree to disagree by supporting separate candidates. However, it was also decided that whoever came out on top would receive the united support of the remaining parties and that each party would refrain from negative campaigning.

In the first round, the BSP won with the UDF coming second and the PU candidate a distant third. The UDF, despite a weak candidate, had applied many of the tactics encouraged by IRI and had run a well-organized campaign. This, and the support from the other parties that was agreed to before hand, made it easy to negotiate in the second round. Due to the overall preponderance of BSP supporters, however, the UDF candidate lost in the second round by 3,000 votes. This, however, was still a significant improvement over the last elections when the pro-democratic parties combined only achieved 31 percent of the vote.

Plovdiv

It was clear from the outset that if the pro-democratic parties were going to win Plovdiv, they would have to do it with a UDF candidate. The UDF campaign organization in Plovdiv quickly absorbed and applied every tactic that IRI encouraged them to use, from door-to-door to message development. They succeeded in making politics fun and, despite the weakness of their candidate, developed one of the strongest campaigns in Bulgaria which allowed the UDF to win in the first round -- the only place where any pro-democratic party did so. This should prove a

huge psychological boost to the UDF because the BSP campaigned heavily here (the PM is a native of Plovdiv), but did exceedingly poorly.

It should be noted, however, that Plovdiv was not without its inter-party problems. When it became clear that the opposition would not have a united candidate in Sofia, IRI and others encouraged the opposition to support a joint candidate in Plovdiv, the second largest city in Bulgaria, as an example to the rest of the country. This proved impossible due to what was perceived as a deliberate move on the part of the UDF to select a member of the portion of the Democratic Party that had not left the UDF. For this reason, and this reason alone, the PU refused to support the UDF candidate, choosing instead to support a candidate of Union New Choice who never had a chance.

Russe

Russe was perhaps the biggest shock of the elections. After the votes were tallied, this traditionally "blue" town, known for its old aristocracy and European pretensions, had both a red mayor and a close-to-red city council.

Early on in Russe, negotiations were on-going but seemed on the point of collapse. The PU and the UDF were at odds over the PU's desire to include a number of nationalistic monarchist parties in the coalition that would be perceived as a betrayal by the MRF. The other parties, including UNC and DAR, seemed content to follow the larger parties' lead. At the beginning of September, a joint candidate by the name of Jordan de Meo was chosen. He and his campaign manager attended the IRI candidate conference. What the IRI did not know at that time was that the "joint" candidate was in reality the candidate of the PU, UDF, and MRF. The monarchists (which are very strong in Russe) as well as DAR, UNC, and the BSDP, were all supporting a second "joint" candidate, a well-known and well respected minister in the Berov government, Mr. Marco Toderov.

De Meo's campaign, though promising, was hesitant to try direct voter contact. Instead, it relied heavily on the campaign manager's ownership of a popular radio station and on a well-

designed campaign poster that was plastered everywhere in Russe. Although the posters were great, they were not followed up with brochures or door-to-door campaigning. As a result, name recognition remained relatively low. In the meantime, the BSP supported an "independent" candidate, a banker, who proved very able and spent a lot of money on a professional campaign. What is more, on election day, he proved to have coattails for the BSP council list, which captured a near majority on the municipal council. In the second round, the Toderov coalition agreed to support de Meo but it did so with little energy or enthusiasm, and de Meo lost, but gained a still respectable 46 percent of the vote. Nonetheless, a red mayor had joined an almost red council in a place where there should have been neither.

Sandanski

Sandanski was one of the places where the collective pro-democratic parties had been taught an early lesson about local elections. It was one of two places (Veliko Turnovo being the other) where disastrous bi-elections were held shortly before December's 1994 parliamentary election. At that time, the pro-democratic parties failed to field a single candidate and focused not on local issues but on issues related to Macedonia. As a consequence, they were soundly trounced, losing by more than 8 percent. The BSP then built on its victory in the region by winning 46 percent of the vote in the parliamentary elections.

The pro-democratic parties had learned their lesson, however, and adopted a winning strategy in the 1995 local elections. First, all of the parties, including DAR, agreed long before the UDF imposed its primary process to support Mr. Borislav Jolev, a member of the UDF, as its candidate for mayor. This meant only two candidates would compete in Sandanski, one of the only places in the country where this was the case. Second, they decided to field separate council lists but explain to the voters that they were a united opposition offering the people of Sandanski a broad choice on the council level in order to get them to the polls. Finally, they agreed to campaign together and to try everything they could to win, including door-to-door, direct mail, coffees, and other IRI-encouraged campaign tactics.

IRI spent a good deal of time in Sandanski and is proud of the effort that was made there. In the end, however, Mr. Jolev lost by less than 100 votes in the first round, despite the fact that the BSP garnered only 38 percent of the vote in the municipal council races. For this reason, the coalition in Sandanski has protested the final results and, at the time of writing, its complaint is still being considered by the Central Election Commission. In the meantime, however, Mr. Jolev has been elected Council President by the pro-democratic parties' majority in the city council. Given the situation in Sandanski only seven months ago, the overall result can be considered a tremendous success.

Veliko Turnovo

Like Sandanski, Veliko Turnovo had been taught an important lesson in bi-elections that were lost badly just prior to the parliamentary elections. Unlike Sandanski, however, there were negotiating problems and last-minute divisions that troubled what was, for the most part, a united effort. The pro-democratic parties decided that they would join together and support a joint candidate for mayor and also would field a joint list, one of the few cities in which this was the case. At the last minute, however, the joint list fell apart. Led by the PU, many of the smaller parties, including DAR and UNC, decided to register their own lists. Although the joint list was dead, support for the joint mayoral candidate remained strong.

The mayoral campaign was run efficiently and fairly effectively. The candidate, however, a professor of numismatics (the study of coins) named Konstantin Dantchev, was not the strongest candidate and was never very comfortable meeting with people. Still, his campaign manager and campaign team brought a good deal of energy and enthusiasm, if not experience, to the campaign. In Veliko Turnovo, as in Stara Zagora, Gabrovo, and Sandanski, the activists who were IRI-trained were always willing to try new ideas. However, they had a difficult time framing a message for Dantchev because, as a professor of an arcane subject, it was not entirely clear what management skills he would bring to the mayor's office.

By far the biggest problem for the campaign, however, was the BSP candidate who had

been mayor 15 years before during the so-called socialist resurrection of the city. A staunch defender of socialist ideology, Mr. Dragni Dragnev managed to appeal to the large bloc of older voters who remembered his prior term with nostalgia. Although he made no inroads among the middle class or the young, neither of these demographic groups were able to balance the vote of those over 60. (Veliko Turnovo, is a favorite place of retirement for former military personnel.) In the end, despite a decent campaign, the pro-democratic parties lost, though respectably; Dantchev obtained 45 percent of the vote. The BSP duplicated its December results by winning 41 percent in the council races, demonstrating that Dragnev's appeal was mostly personal. Nonetheless, the BSP now has a working majority in the council.