

from **Corinne Deloy**
translated by Helen Levy

D-7
7 days before
the poll

The candidate of the ruling party, Rossen Plevneliev, running favourite in the presidential election in Bulgaria just one week before the vote

The Bulgarians are being called to elect the successor to Georgi Parvanov to the Presidency of the Republic on 23rd and 30th October. On the same dates they will also be appointing their local and regional representatives. In Bulgaria, the head of State (and his Vice-President, with whom he forms a ticket) is elected for a five year term in office that is renewable once (outgoing president Georgi Parvanov is coming to the end of his 2nd mandate and therefore he cannot stand again).

Many polling stations will be open to the Bulgarians living abroad in various countries (46 in Turkey, 23 in Spain, 14 in the USA, 7 in Moldova etc ...) 135,000 Bulgarians living abroad voted in the last general elections on 5th July 2009.

The candidate of the party in power, Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria (GERB, "shield" in Bulgarian), Rossen Plevneliev, is running favourite in the election and should, according to all of the polls, win on 30th October next. The number of candidates (18 in all) makes it highly unlikely that any of the candidates will win in the first round.

18 people are running for the supreme office, including 12 who are being put forward by political parties and six by voters' committees:

- Rossen Plevneliev, former Regional Development and Public Works Minister in the government led by Prime Minister Boyko Borissov (GERB), was appointed as the GERB's candidate, a party which he does not belong to, on 4th September last. He was chosen to form a ticket with former Justice Minister Margarita Popova;
- Ivaylo Kalfine, MEP and former Foreign Minister (2005-2009) in the government led by Serguey Stanichev, is the Socialist Party's candidate (BSP), of which he is not a member (he belongs to the Social Democratic Party, which is not to the taste of some socialists). He is standing with Stefan Danaylov, a famous actor (he is a hero in a TV series Stuklen Dom, the Glass House), and is former Culture Minister (2005-2009);
- Meglena Kuneva, former European Affairs Minister (2002-2006) and former European Commissioner for Consumer Protection (2007-2009) announced that she was running on 6th June last. Situated at the centre of the political scale, she is running as an independent. She chose to form a ticket with

economist Lubomir Christiv, who worked for the Bulgarian Central Bank and also the World Bank;

- Volen Siderov, the far right leader of Ataka (A), parliamentary support to the government led by Boyko Borissov, which also rallies the GERB, the Blue Coalition, an alliance formed by the Union of Democratic Forces (ODS), led by Martin Dimitrov and the Democrats for a Strong Bulgaria (DSB). Loser in the last presidential election on 22nd and 29th October 2006, Volen Siderov did however reach the second round in which he won 24.05% of the vote against 75.94% for Georgi Parvanov. The nationalist leader forms a ticket with Pavel Chopov;
- Rumen Christov, the Blue Coalition's candidate is standing with former Interior Minister (1999-2001), Emanouïl Yordanov ;
- Atanas Semov is running under the banner of the Party for Order, Law and Justice (RZS) led by Yané Yanev. He is forming a ticket with the town councillor of Sofia Polia Stancheva;
- Maria Cappone and Nikola Kissiov (the United People's Party);
- Pavel Tchernev and Anélia Deltchéva (the People's Party);

Presidential Election in Bulgaria 23rd and 30th October 2011

- Sali Ibriam and Valentina Gotseva (National Unity Movement);
- Krassimir Karakatchanov and Daniela Simidcheyeva-Dimitrova (Macedonian Domestic Revolutionary Organisation-Bulgarian National Movement, VMRO-BND);
- Stefan Solakov and Galina Vassileva (the National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria, NDSO);
- Nikolay Nenchev and Jeko Ivanov (Farmers' Popular Union, BZNS);
- Andreï Tchurbanov and Anguel Mirtchev (Bulgarian Democratic Community);
- Ventsislav Yossifov and Emilian Dimitrov;
- Dimitar Koutsarov, former policeman and owner of a security company and Kamelia Todorova, a jazz singer;
- Alexey Petrov and Nikolay Gueorguyev;
- Svetoslav Vitkov and Ventsislav Mitsov, who are both famous rock singers;
- Nikolai Vassilev and Vladimir Savov.

The Commission responsible for investigating people affiliated to the former State security services prior to 1989 declared that four candidates – Alexey Petrov, Krassimir Karakachanov, Stefan Solakov and Ventsislav Yossifov – had belonged or worked with the State security services at the time Bulgaria was a communist country.

"The priority is to improve people's lives and on this point we are different from Rossen Plevneliev who takes great pride in projects such as the European Union, the building of motorways and the signing of building permits. I think that people are not interested in this since they have other problems. The State's priorities must be the creation of jobs, increasing salaries, access to healthcare, the country's security, the image of Bulgaria amongst its partners," declared the Socialist candidate Ivaylo Kalfine. In his opinion the GERB candidate Rossen Plevneliev would be unable to guarantee the unity of the nation if he were elected. "We have a man – Prime Minister Boyko Borissov – who imposes himself on the entire State," says Ivaylo Kalfine, who is trying to convince his fellow countrymen of the destructive nature of power if concentrated in the hands of the GERB and of the danger that the election of Rossen Plevneliev as President of the Republic would represent. He says he supports the enhancement of the role of the President of the Republic, by example via the establishment of new laws on the referendum or on the right to veto (the head of State has the right to veto enabling him to reject a draft law towards the National Assembly, thereby obliging MPs to open debate on it once more).

"Ivaylo Kalfine is not running for the presidential election, but to become Prime Minister. But we are not voting for general elections. The head of State does not give money out, does not decide on salaries or wages. We need a national plan for the development of our economy and our social sector," said Rossen Plevneliev, who qualified the practice of holding referenda as being "a nuclear bomb for democracy".

On 11th October Rossen Plevneliev and Ivaylo Kalfine faced each other in a debate that was broadcast by the channel TV7. Half of the viewers (47.5%) believed the ruling party's candidate was more convincing, 31% spoke in favour of the socialist candidate according to a poll published by the daily Dnevnik.

Ivan Kostov, former Prime Minister (1997-2001) and leader of the Democrats for a Strong Bulgaria declared that he was supporting Rumen Christov, the Blue Coalition candidate, in the first round of the presidential election. "I shall show my political loyalty and I will do what I have to do," he declared. Recent tensions that disrupted the Bulgarian right after the leader of the Union of Democratic Forces, Martin Dimitrov signed an agreement for the presidential election with the Community of Democratic Forces without his partner, Ivan Kostov knowing about it, nearly led to a break-up between the two parties. The leader of the Democrats for a Strong Bulgaria believes that it would be damaging, if not dangerous, for the GERB to monopolise all of the power.

The Movement for Rights and Freedom (DPS) led by Ahmed Dogan, who represents the Turkish minority in Bulgaria (around 9% of the population) has, as is his custom, announced that he would support none of the candidates, and that he would say after the first round which of the two remaining candidates he would like see come to office as President of the Republic.

The last weeks of the electoral campaign have been marked by incidents that followed the death of Angel Petrov (19 years old) on 23rd September; he was knocked down by a car, which was being driven by someone close to the Kiril Rachkov family, otherwise known as King Kiro, the local patriarch of the Roma community in Katunitsa (13km from Plovdiv in the south of the country). After this dramatic incident there were riots in several towns, including in Sofia and Plovdiv. The houses of the Kiril Rachkov family were burned and the police did nothing to calm the demonstrators. 127 people were arrested, including King Kiro. Prime Minister Boyko Borissov and President of the Republic Georgi Parvanov went to the scene of the events. The head of government, who did

not condemn the demonstrators, recalled that "ethnic peace is the country's most precious asset".

"Before being a Roma Kiril Rachkov is an oligarch, a Mafioso – like dozens of others, he is a result of the democratic transition. Having said this it has to be admitted that the affair would not have got to this stage if Kiril Rachkov had not been a Roma," indicates anthropologist Haralan Alexandrov.

A legal inquiry was launched into six companies held by Kiril Rachkov and his acolytes, as well as twelve people and two foundations that have links with the same man. King Kiro has been accused of threatening the lives of others and may also be prosecuted for tax fraud if it is proven, as the Bulgarian judges believe; that he and his entourage have not paid their taxes for several years. The statute of limitations for this crime is 10 years in Bulgaria.

According to the National Statistics Institute 325, 343 people, i.e. 4.9% of the country's total population is Roma (4.2% say that Romany is their mother tongue) after a census dating back to February. Experts believe that the Roma population in Bulgaria lies at around 10%. Around 560,000 people (8.8% of the population) say they are members of the Turkish speaking minority and 84.5% (5.6 million) say they are Bulgarian. Around one Bulgarian in ten (9%) does not want to declare which ethnic group he/she belongs to.

The National Assembly, the only Chamber in Parliament, decided to suspend its plenary sessions between the 12th and 21st October with the aim of avoiding any electoral propaganda.

According to the most recent poll by the institute Alpha Research, one third of the Bulgarians (32%) are about to vote for Rossen Plevneliev (GERB). Ivaylo Kalfine (PSB) is due to win 18%, Meglena Kuneva, 9%, Volen Siderov (Ataka), 4%, and Rumen Christov, 3%.

Rossen Plevneliev holds the majority amongst the most qualified Bulgarians and amongst those living in the major towns and cities. The socialist candidate has the support of the elderly and the less qualified, such as the Roma and the Turkish speaking minority.

The polls reveal that Rossen Plevneliev is due to win the presidential election in the second round with 46% of the vote, if he faces Ivaylo Kalfine (23% of the vote) and by 43%, if he faces Meglena Kuneva (27%).

After ten years with Georgi Parvanov as their president, everyone is expecting change. The socialists hope to reach the second round of voting. Just two years from the next general elections, (planned in 2013), the results on 23rd and 30th October will provide a wealth of useful information for both of the country's main parties to learn from.

You can read all of our publications on our site:
www.robert-schuman.eu

Publishing Director: Pascale JOANNIN

THE FONDATION ROBERT SCHUMAN, created in 1991 and acknowledged by State decree in 1992, is the main French research centre on Europe. It develops research on the European Union and its policies and promotes the content of these in France, Europe and abroad. It encourages, enriches and stimulates European debate thanks to its research, publications and the organisation of conferences. The Foundation is presided over by Mr. Jean-Dominique Giuliani.