

The right wins the Bulgarian elections but the country finds itself in stalemate.

Corinne Deloy

Translated by Helen Levy

Results

The Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria (GERB), the party led by outgoing Prime Minister Boyko Borissov came out ahead in the early general elections that took place in Bulgaria on 12th May. The definitive results confirmed the status quo marked by the impossibility for both biggest political parties to form a coalition government with an absolute majority. According to the electoral commission the party led by Boyko Borissov won 30.50% of the vote and 97 seats (-20 in comparison with the last election on 5th July 2009) in the National Assembly, the only Chamber of the parliament. This result is an all-time first in Bulgaria where the party of the outgoing Prime Minister has never won in the following election since the country's return to democracy in 1990. However the GERB has not won the necessary majority to govern alone.

The Socialist Party (BSP), the main opposition party led by former Prime Minister Serguey Stăničev (2005-2009), won 26.61% of the vote and 84 seats (+44). The Movement for Rights and Freedom (DPS) led by Lyutvi Mestan, which represents the Turkish minority in Bulgaria (around 8.8% of the population), took third place with 11.29% of the vote and 36 seats (-1). Finally, Ataka, a far right party led by Volen Siderov, won 7.30% of the vote and 23 seats (+2).

Turnout was low: 51.33% of the Bulgarians voted in comparison with 62.22% in the previous general elections on 5th July 2009.

(Partial) general election results of 12th May 2013 in Bulgaria

Turnout: 48%

Political Parties	% of votes won	No. of seats won
Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria (GERB)	30,50%	97
Socialist Party (BSP)	26,61%	84
Movement for Rights and Freedom (DPS)	11,29%	36
Ataka (A)	7,30%	23
Others	24,30%	0

Source: <http://results.cik.bg/pi2013/rezultati/>

There are two possibilities in the wake of this election: a GERB alliance with Ataka or with the Socialist Party. "A grand coalition would protect the interests of the politicians in particular," declared Assen Yordanov, a co-founder of the investigative site bivol.bg. "Yes, the country is in bad shape, like the rest of Europe incidentally. It will not necessarily get better. But in times of crisis, as in times of war, people are required who are prepared to do everything for their country,"

stressed Boyko Borissov who said he would "sacrifice" himself to govern Bulgaria for four more years, and possibly with other parties from the right. The outgoing Prime Minister did however reject any idea of forming an alliance with the socialists: "It's as if Real Madrid and the Barça decided to form one team," he pointed out. "Bulgaria needs stability and if the parties are responsible they should support a minority cabinet," declared outgoing Interior Minister, Tsvetan Tsvetanov

(GERB).

"There is no way that we can support the GERB. We cannot support people who have declared themselves in favour of an anti-Bulgarian policy, for a policy against our State," declared the nationalist leader, Volen Siderov when the results were announced. Ataka supported Boyko Borissov's government in 2009 before drawing away from it.

A grand coalition between the GERB and the Socialist Party seems impossible since the electoral campaign between the country's two main parties was so violent. *"There is a very great risk of parliament finding itself in stalemate. The extremely negative nature of the campaign, in which scandals prevailed, damaged the legitimacy of the political classes in Bulgarian public opinion"* indicated the Director of the Institute for Regional and International Studies, Ognian Minchev.

"The main opposition parties, - Socialist and the Movement for Rights and Freedom - might also have more than 120 seats together and that changes everything," indicated Andreï Raïtchev, a political scientist and analyst at the Gallup Institute.

Socialist leader Serguey Stanichev has also said that he is prepared to negotiate with the Turkish party, with Ataka and with the organisations representing civil society to form a government in order to avoid further demonstrations. *"The GERB is totally isolated; the results show the start of the party's slow death. The first thing to do is to get the GERB out of office,"* he stressed. *"We are also going to talk with the various citizens' organisations to help them to take control of the institutions,"* added the opposition leader Plamen Oresharski, former Finance Minister (2005-2009), the lead candidate on the Socialist Party list in the general elections on 12th May and the Socialist Party's candidate for the position of Prime Minister.

"We must stop the political crisis in Bulgaria getting any worse. We must find a solution rapidly and form a stable government," maintained Lyutvi Mestan.

If the parties fail to form a coalition after the general elections the interim government led since 12th March by Marin Raykov will have to stay in office. The President of the Republic, Rossen Plevneliev (GERB) said during the electoral campaign that if no government was formed after the election it might be preferable to

put together a government of experts to prevent the country entering a period of instability.

"My true concern is that the political classes and also the public institutions have lost their legitimacy beyond the point of no-return" analyses Ivelin Sardamov of the American University of Bulgaria. The events which tarnished the electoral campaign can but confirm his idea. At the end of March the outgoing Interior Minister (and Vice-President of the GERB) Tsvetan Tsvetanov was accused of having organised illegal telephone tapping. The Court of Sofia declared that it had enough evidence to prosecute him. *"The telephone tapping affair which has rocked the country proves once more that the system is rotten. Hundreds of opponents, businessmen and journalists are said to have been spied upon by the Interior Minister's services, by Tsvetan Tsvetanov, a candidate in the general elections. This shows that the system is entirely corrupt. The European Union must place Bulgaria in quarantine, I can see no other solution,"* maintains journalist Assen Yordanov.

The director of the General Department for the Fight against Organised Crime (GDBOP) (GDBOP) Stanimir Florov, Tsvetan Tsvetanov's right-hand man and director of Boyko Borissov's campaign is suspected of having received bribes of 20,000€ in 1999 in order to warn suspects and/or of having warned them of possible police action against them and of having turned a blind eye to the exchange of bribes over drug networks controlled by citizens from the Middle-East in Bulgaria. The President of the Republic Rossen Plevneliev has asked for Stanimir Florov to be suspended from office. He has been replaced by Valentin Trifonov.

Some days before the election, the GERB lodged a complaint for abuse of power with the Court against socialist leader Serguey Stanichev. It suspects the latter of having fraudulently selected the company responsible for producing new Bulgarian identity documents and of having increased the budget of the order (from 16 to 116 million €) in an unjustified manner between 2005 and 2009. Because this company was represented at the time by the wife of a leader of the European Socialist Party (PSE) Hannes Swoboda, Boyko Borissov's party maintains that Serguey Stanichev might have "bought" his position as President of the European party (the socialist leader has been chair of the PSE since

November 2001).

Finally on the eve of the general elections the Court in Sofia announced that it had seized 350,000 illegal voting slips at a printing establishment in the town of Kostinbrod, the owner of which Yordan Bontchev, is a town councillor and member of the GERB. The Socialist Party denounced this as electoral fraud, the leader of the Movement for Rights and Freedom, Lyutvi Mestan spoke of an attempted *coup d'Etat* via the massive falsification of the election and Ivan Kostov, former Prime Minister (1997-2001) and leader of the Democrats for a Strong Bulgaria (DSB) asked for the postponement of the general elections on 12th May.

According to NGO Transparency International, Bulgaria is the second most corrupt country in the European Union.

The Organisation for Cooperation and Security in Europe (OSCE) sent more than 200 observers to Bulgaria to monitor the election. This was its biggest mission in the country since the first free election in 1990. In all 275 observers from five international organisations were present for the elections. 15 Bulgarian NGOs were also present to monitor the electoral process. Several opposition parties (Socialist Party, the Democrats for a Strong Bulgaria, Ataka and the Movement for Rights and Freedom) asked the Austrian institute SORA to do a simultaneous count of the voting slips.

Over the last few weeks the Court has opened 43 inquiries into the purchasing of votes in the general elections that took place on 12th May. In a poll by NCIOM and published on 19th April last 11% of Bulgarians declared that they were prepared to sell their voting slip. Accord-

ing to the deputy General Prosecutor Assia Petrova the price of a vote could rise to 100 leva (50€). After the presidential and local elections on 23rd and 30th October 2011 102 people were convicted of this crime, with two prison sentences but in the main those who had organised the vote trafficking went unpunished.

Bulgaria is not yet free of the danger of further demonstrations (caused by a major rise in electricity tariffs) that occurred at the beginning of the year. The coordinators of the social movement have threatened to call on the population to come out into the streets again. *"Politicians did not listen to the people and we do not intend to retreat,"* declared Yanaki Ganchev, the leader of the Eagle Bridge Movement (Orlov most, the square in Sofia where the violent demonstrations of the first months of 2013 took place). *"This vote is about to lead to the same parliament as before comprising an oligarchy and the mafia we chased out. I fear that we shall not just be witnessing demonstrations but barricades,"* indicated Anguel Slavtchev of the Movement for Citizens' Control who stood in the election on 12th May (with the Democratic Civic Initiative led by Stefan Peev).

It is difficult to forecast what will come of the post-electoral negotiations in Bulgaria. The country does however need vital stability to introduce reforms that will enable a real end to corruption and which will quash the monopolies, extend working hours before retirement and even reduce the number of hospitals and universities. Whatever happens the next government's room to manoeuvre will probably be extremely tight in the face of the demands made by the people.

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.