

The candidate of the party in office Tsetska Tsasheva is the favourite in the polls just one week before the first round of the Presidential election on Bulgaria.

On 6th November the Bulgarians are being called to ballot to appoint the successor to Rossen Plevneliev as President of the Republic. The latter announced on 20th May last that he would not be standing for a second term in office due to personal reasons. The fatal accident of his 14 year-old son in August 2015 is almost certainly related to his withdrawal from the political arena.

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21 candidates are standing in the presidential election i.e. three more in comparison with the previous presidential election on 23rd and 30th October 2011. Around 34,000 Bulgarians living abroad are registered to vote, notably in the UK, Turkey, Germany, the USA and Spain.

If none of the candidates win on 6th November next there is a strong likelihood, given the number of candidates that a second round will take place on 13th November.

The electoral campaign started on 7th October and will end on 4th November at midnight. The Bulgarian Parliament decided to go into recess for a month so that MPs could work on the presidential campaign if they wanted to.

New Electoral Law

Three government parties in the coalition with Prime Minister Boyko Borissov – Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria (GERB); the Reformist Bloc (RB), (which rallies the Democrats for a Strong Bulgaria led by Radan Kanev, the Bulgarian Movement for Citizens led by Meglena Kuneva, the Union of Democratic Forces, the National Freedom and Dignity Party and the National Agrarian Union) and the Patriotic Front – changed the electoral law three weeks prior to the first round of the presidential election. The National Assembly (Narodno sabranie), the

only chamber in Parliament, approved these changes on 18th October.

On 6th November the Bulgarians are also being called to vote by referendum on the reform of the electoral law and notably on the replacement of the proportional vote by a majority vote, the introduction of the obligatory vote (a measure adopted by parliament) and the reduction of the State subsidies given to the political parties (from 11 lev (5.60 €) to 1 lev (0.50 €) for each vote won). The first point is undoubtedly the one which might have the most impact since it undeniably favours the “big” parties. Moreover it might provide stability to a political arena that certainly requires it.

The popular vote was put forward by the TV presenter Slavi Trifonov, who won 572,650 signatures in support of his project, which over the 400 000 signatures required for any citizen who wants to organise a referendum on a draft law.

The spokesperson of the Central Electoral Committee, Tsvetozar Tomov, declared on the TV channel Nova TV that “no sanctions would be taken against anyone who does not go to vote” whilst the vote is now obligatory in Bulgaria.

The Bulgarians now have a new voting option and will on 6th November be able to vote for “none of the candidates”, a choice offered to them for all elections that take place according to the majority vote, just like those organised to appoint the president of the Republic and the MPs.

The candidates running

The 21 candidates running in the presidential election on 6th and

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13th November are:

- Tsetska Tsatsheva (and Plamen Manushev, candidate for Vice-President), 58 years old, candidate for the party in office (GERB), present leader of the National Assembly;
- Rumen Radev (and Iliana Yotova), 53 years old, former head of the airforce supported by a committee of voters and by the Socialist Party (BSP) led by Kornelia Ninova;
- Traysho Traykov (and Sabi Sabev), 46 years old, candidate for the Reformist Bloc (RB), former Minister for the Economy, Energy and Tourism (2009-2012);
- Tatiana Donsheva (and Minsho Spasov), 56 years old, candidate of the coalition formed by the Movement 21 and the National Movement for Stability and Progress;
- Krassimir Karakashanov (and Yavor Notev), 51 years old, MP, candidate for the coalition United Patriots, which rallies the National Movement for the Salvation of Bulgaria, Ataka and the National Movement (VMRO) ;
- Ivaylo Kalfin (and Lyubomir Halachev), 52 years old, former Deputy Prime Minister and Labour and Social Policy Minister (2014-2016), unfortunate candidate in the last Presidential election on 23rd and 30rd October 2011 in which he won 47.44% of the vote in the second round of the election against Rossen Plevneliev;
- Plamen Oresharski (and Danail Papazov), former Prime Minister (2013-2014) and Finance Minister (2005-2009), standing as an independent;
- Dimiter Marinov (and Radoslav Petrov), better known as Mityo the Pistol, organiser of beauty pageants;
- Bisser Milanov (and Krasimir Nastev), whose fame grew due to the protest movements against the Bulgarian government in 2013 and who has spent some time in prison;
- George Ganshev (and Kolyo Paramov), 77 years old, candidate of the Christian Democratic Union;
- Velizar Enshev (and Bilyana Grancharova), 63 years old, candidate for the Movement for Radical Change-Bulgarian Spring;
- Alexander Tomov (and Radoslav Radoslavov), candidate for the Bulgarian Social-Euroleft;
- Nikolai Banev (and Sali Ibrayim), 57 years old, billionaire, standing as an independent;
- Vesselin Mareshki (and Petar Petrov), 49 years old, businessman;
- Gospodin Tonshev (and Andrey Andreev), candidate for the Bulgarian Democratic Community;
- Kamen Popov (and Georgi Nedelshhev), standing as an independent;
- Kemil Ramadan (and Momshil Dobrev), candidate for the

Balkan Democratic League;

- Diana Dimitrova (and Gabriel Gerasimov), standing as an independent;
- Yordanka Koleva (and Veselin Hristov), standing as an independent;
- Plamen Paskov (and Svetozar Saev) standing as an independent;
- Roumen Galabinov (and Veska Voleva) standing as an independent.

The electoral campaign

On 3rd October Prime Minister Boyko Borissov announced that he would be standing for the presidential election in ... 2021! and indicated that he would be resigning from office as head of the government if the GERB candidate, Tsetska Tsasheva, did not win the presidential election in the first round. In his opinion this would enable an assessment of the influence of each political party. For the GERB to retain its legitimacy to govern its candidate must therefore win. In the event of the contrary the head of government will resign and at the same time a snap election will be organised in order to win back legitimacy.

According to the political analysts a new general election would lead to a GERB victory but it would not win an absolute majority. "Bulgaria needs stability, national unity and to see the rule of law," declared Tsetska Tsasheva, who aims to become Bulgaria's first woman president.

The choice of Rumen Radev as the candidate on the government left marks a rapprochement between the Socialist Party and the Alternative for the Revival of Bulgaria (ABV), the party of former President of the Republic (2002-2012), Georgi Parvanov. The choice is a wise one since the armed forces enjoy a good image. However, Rumen Radev is somewhat a stranger to the Bulgarians, which in the present context, is a rather an advantage. He gained renown in 2014 when he presented his resignation to Prime Minister Boyko Borissov in protest against the weak support provided by the State to the air force. He took back his resignation after having spoken with the head of government.

Meglana Kuneva, leader of the Bulgaria for the Citizens Movement, a member of the Reformist Bloc, announced on 17th October last that her party would leave government if its candidate (that of the Reformist Bloc) Traytsho Traykov did not improve the results achieved by the party's candidate in the last two

presidential election of 6th November next.

The Presidential office

The President of the Bulgarian Republic (and the Vice-President with whom he forms a tandem) is elected for a mandate of 5 years that is renewable once. The candidates to the supreme office can be put forward by the political parties, electoral alliances and committees of voters.

The presidential office is mainly honorary; the head of State has the power to place his veto, enabling him to send a draft bill

back to the National Assembly, which obliges the MPs to open debate again.

The President of the Republic is the head of the armed forces, he concludes international treaties and represents his country abroad. The Constitution prohibits the head of State's membership of a political party. Moreover the Vice President cannot be from the same party.

Reminder of the presidential election results on 23rd and 30th October 2011 in Bulgaria

Turnout: 52.29% (1st round) and 48.25% (2nd round)

Candidates	Number of votes won (1st round)	Number of votes won in % (1st round)	Number of votes won (2nd round)	Number of votes won in % (2nd round)
Rossen Plevneliev (Citizens for a European Development of Bulgaria, GERB)	1 349 380	40.11	1 698 136	52.58
Ivaylo Kalfin (Socialist Party, BSP)	974 300	28.96	1 531 193	47.42
Meglana Kuneva (Voters' Committee)	470 808	14		
Volen Siderov (Ataka, A)	122 466	3.64		
Stefan Solakov (National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria, NDSO)	84 205	2.50		
Rumen Hristov (Blue Coalition)	65 761	1.95		
Atanas Semov (Order, Law and Justice, RSZ)	61 797	1.84		
Svetoslav Vitkov (Voters' Committee)	54 125	1.61		
Sali Ibrayim (National Unity Movement)	41 837	1.24		
Krassimir Karakashanov (Bulgarian National Movement, VMRO-BND)	33 236	0.99		
Aleksey Petrov	31 613	0.94		
Maria Kapon (United People's Party)	30 665	0.91		
Nikolay Nenshev (National Agrarian Union, BZNS)	9 827	0.29		
Pavel Shernev (Party for the People of the Nation)	8 081	0.24		
Ventsislav Yosifov (Voters' Committee)	7 021	0.21		
Dimitar Kutsarov (Voters' Committee)	6 989	0.21		
Andrey Shorbanov (Bulgarian Democratic Unity)	6 340	0.19		
Nikolay Vasilev (Voters' Committee)	5 633	0.17		

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Survey polls

The most recent poll by Mediana forecasts 25.4% of the vote for Tsetska Tsasheva, in the first round and 18% for Rumen Radev. Although the GERB candidate is managing to rally three quarters (75%) of her party's supporters, the electorate on the left seems to be more motivated.

Krassimir Karakachanov is due to come 3rd with 9.9% of the vote followed by Ivaylo Kalfin, with 6.1%, and Tatyana Donsheva, 4.8%, Traycho Traykov with 4.2%, Vesselin Mareshki, 3.2%, Plamen Oresharski 1.3% and George Ganshev, 0.6%.

The voting choice made by those close to the Movement for

Rights and Freedoms (DPS) led by Mustafa Karadayi, representing the Turkish minority in Bulgaria might turn out to be decisive, since the party is not putting any candidate forward in this presidential election.

Around 11% of those interviewed declared they would vote blank, null or put a "no candidates" slip in the ballot box. Those who choose this option are mainly young people living in the major cities. 13.4% of those surveyed maintained they would not go to vote on 6th November. The referendum should however help to improve turnout.

According to the polls in the second round Tsetska Tsasheva will beat Rumen Radev.

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