

Bulgarians go to the polls for the 7th general elections in under 4 years

On 27th October, for the seventh time since April 2021 and for the second time this year, Bulgarians are being called to the polls to elect the 240 members of the National Assembly (*Narodno sabranie*), the single chamber of Parliament.

30,688 people have registered to vote from abroad, primarily from Turkey, Germany and the United Kingdom. 720 polling stations will be open outside Bulgaria for this election, in which 28 parties and coalitions are in the running.

These general elections follow the failure to form a stable government after the previous elections on 9 June, which were won by the Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria (GERB), led by the former Prime minister (2009-2013, 2014-2017, 2017-2021) Boyko Borissov, with 23.99% of the vote (and 68 seats), ahead of the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS), representing the Turkish-speaking minority, chaired (at the time) by Delyan Peevski and Djevdet Chakarov, which won 16.56% of the vote and 47 seats. We Continue the Change-Democratic Bulgaria (PP-DB), a liberal coalition uniting the party founded by Kiril Petkov and Asen Vassilev with Democratic Bulgaria, which comprises Yes, Bulgaria! and the Democrats for a Strong Bulgaria, won 13.92% of the vote and 39 MPs, and Revival (Vazrazhdane, V), a nationalist party led by Kostadin Kostanidov, won 13.38% of the vote and 38 seats.

President Rumen Radev could but acknowledge the failure of the three parties he had successively asked to form a government - GERB, DPS and There is such a people (Ima takuv narod, ITN), a populist party founded by singer and TV presenter Slavi Trifonov - to fulfil their mission and the Head of State was therefore forced to call for new elections. Two general elections in 2021 and the one in 2022 led to the same result.

Only 2 of the last 6 elections (on 14 November 2021 and 2 April 2023) resulted in the formation of a

government, but both coalitions failed after reform-oriented leaders tried to tackle corruption and end the country's dependence on Russia for energy and security.

After the elections on 2 April 2023, the resolve to put an end to these repeated elections, the country's considerable economic difficulties and the concession made by the leader of Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria, Boyko Borissov, to accept the principle of a control mechanism for Prosecutor General Ivan Guechev, accused for several years of preventing the continuation of investigations into oligarchs subject to international sanctions, led to the signing of an agreement between GERB and PP-DB. This agreement provided for the formation of a coalition government comprising experts for a period of at least 18 months, with a rotation every 9 months between members of the two parties for the posts of Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister.

On 6 June 2023, Nikolai Denkov (PP) was appointed head of a government of national unity. On 5 March 2024, as planned, he resigned to allow Mariya Gabriel (GERB) to succeed him. On 20 March, however, the two parties failed to agree on the control of certain ministries and the government collapsed.

It is true that the coalition was somewhat unnatural, with We Continue Change being founded on its opposition to Bulgarian President Rumen Radev and his

pro-Russian orientation and aiming to unseat Boyko Borissov's GERB.

According to the latest opinion poll by the Market Links institute, GERB is expected to come out ahead on 27 October with 27.1% of the vote. It is expected to be followed by the liberal PP-DB coalition with 16.5% of the vote and Revival (Vazrazhdane, V) with 15.6%.

The DPS-New Start, one of the two parties representing Turkish-speakers, chaired by Delyan Peevski, is expected to win 9.9% and the Alliance for Rights and Freedoms, another DPS party, led by Dzhevdet Chakarov, 7.5%. The Socialist Party (BSP), led by Atanas Zafirov, is projected to take sixth place with 6.2%.

Two other parties are approaching the 4% of votes cast required for a party to be represented in Parliament. These are There is such a people (3.9%) and Greatness (Velichie), a pro-Russian party founded by Ivelin Mihailov and chaired by Albena Pekova (3.8%).

According to a poll conducted by Alpha Research, 53.6% of Bulgarians do not believe that this 7th election will provide a stable government. Furthermore, six out of ten Bulgarians (61.6%) describe the current situation as *'very worrying'*. Pessimism is growing in the country with each passing month and poll.

Turnout is expected to be low due to the number of elections Bulgarians have experienced since April 2021. In that election, voter participation stood at 40.1%, having fallen to 33.0% on 9 June, when the parliamentary elections were held in conjunction with the European elections.

'The electoral battle continues to rage. Not only does it irritate the population, it is also causing a number of destructive processes, the blocking of several institutions and the alienation of citizens. The solution to the crisis lies in the hands of the political parties, and they must accept that the basis for creating a government coalition should not be thought of after the elections, but well before', declared Rumen Radev. *'Since 2001, the trend has been to elect coalition governments and parliament is becoming increasingly fragmented, which means that coalitions should be increasingly broad-based or that the largest parties*

should agree to govern together, as was the case in the previous National Assembly. This trend towards fragmentation is accompanied by another feature, namely that at each general election, a newly formed political party enters parliament', points out Ivan Nachev, a political science researcher at the New University.

Meanwhile, Bulgaria suffers from endemic corruption that threatens the rule of law, and its economy is stagnating (the budget will not be voted on until 27 October). *'We are experiencing the most serious crisis since 1989'*, said Dimitar Ganev, a political science researcher at Sofia University.

Bulgaria is set to receive €5.69 billion as part of the European Union's recovery plan. However, to date, the European Commission has only made one payment, whereas the country should have received four. As a result, it may well lose part of the sums earmarked for it. Moreover, Sofia will not be joining the eurozone on 1 January 2025.

Following the general elections on 9 June, the DPS came under considerable strain. A process to exclude those close to the previous leader, Ahmed Dogan, was launched by supporters of the party's other leader, Delyan Peevski. Ahmed Dogan was opposed to the formation of a GERB-led government, while Delyan Peevski supported it. In parliament, 30 DPS deputies voted in favour of the government, while 15 voted against.

On 27 August, Delyan Peevski was dismissed as party chairman and seven of his closest deputies were expelled. This led to a split in the DPS, with supporters of Delyan Peevski forming the DPS-New Start, which united with the Bulgarian Voice Party and the New Leaders Party. Those close to Ahmed Dogan initially took the name Democracy, Rights and Freedoms, then joined forces with the United Patriots (SBOR) and the National Agrarian Union.

The two groups had the same acronym (DPS) as the previous party, which the Electoral Commission did not accept. Delyan Peevski's group was allowed to keep its name, while the second party finally chose to call itself the Alliance for Rights and Freedoms.

The BSP expelled its leader of 8 years, Korneliya Ninova. She has been replaced by Atanas Zafirov. The BSP has joined forces with 15 other left-wing parties in a coalition called United Left. The BSP has always been opposed to any arms supplies to Ukraine and is maintaining its position. *'Ukraine is a red line for the party. The party is for peace and we must stay out of this war'* declared one of its leaders, Borislav Gustanov. PP-DB renewed its coalition agreement at the beginning of September. The liberal alliance brings together the party led by Kiril Petkov with Democratic Bulgaria, which includes Hristo Ivano's Yes, Bulgaria! and the Democrats for a Strong Bulgaria led by Atanas Atanasov.

THE BULGARIAN POLITICAL SYSTEM

The Bulgarian Parliament is unicameral. The National Assembly (Narodno sabranie) has 240 deputies, elected every 4 years in 31 multi-member constituencies corresponding to the country's oblasti (counties). The voting system is a mixed one: 31 MPs are elected under the majority system (first past the post) and 209 under the proportional representation system (on closed lists). The Hare-Niemeyer method is used to distribute seats. A political party must obtain a minimum of 4% of the votes cast in order to be represented in parliament.

Candidates must be at least 21 years old. To be able to put forward candidates, parties must collect the signatures of at least 15,000 voters, and are obliged to deposit with the electoral authorities the sum of 10,000 lev (€5,113), which will be reimbursed if they receive at least 1% of the votes cast. Independent candidates must be supported by at least 10,000 voters from the electoral district in which they are standing.

Since 2016, Bulgarians have also had the option, in both the general and presidential elections, of placing

a ballot paper expressly stating 'I do not support any of the candidates.

6 political parties and 1 coalition are represented in the current parliament:

- Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB), founded in 2006 by former prime minister (2009-2013, 2014-2017, 2017-2021) Boyko Borissov, has 68 elected members;
- The Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS), representing the Turkish-speaking minority, founded in 1989 and chaired (at the time) by Delyan Peevski and Djevdet Chakarov, has 47 seats;
- We Continue the Change-Democratic Bulgaria (PP-DB), a liberal coalition uniting the party led by Kiril Petkov with Democratic Bulgaria, which comprises Yes, Bulgaria! the Democrats for a Strong Bulgaria and is led by Hristo Ivano. It has 39 MPs;
- Revival (Vazrazhdane, V), a nationalist party founded in 2014 and led by Kostadin Kostanidov, has 38 seats;
- The Socialist Party (BSP), led by Atanas Zafirov, has 19 seats;
- There is such a people (Ima takuv narod, ITN), a populist party founded by singer and TV presenter Slavi Trifonov, has 16 MPs;
- Greatness (Velichie), a pro-Russian party founded by Ivelin Mihailov and chaired by Albena Pekova, has 13 seats.

Bulgarians also elect their President of the Republic by direct universal suffrage. On 21 November 2021, Roumen Radev, supported by the BSP, We Continue the Change, There is such a people and Stand Up BG! We are coming! (Izpravi se BG! Nie idvame!), was elected for a 2nd term in the 2nd round with 66.72% of the vote. He beat Anastas Guerdjikov, supported by GERB and the Union of Democratic Forces (ODS), who won 31.80% of the vote. Turnout was 33.55%.

General elections in Bulgaria

27th October 2024

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Results of the general elections in Bulgaria on 9 June 2024

Turnout: 33.40%

Political Parties	Number of votes won	% of votes won	Seats
Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB)	530 658	23.99	68
Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS)	366 310	16.56	47
We Continue the Change-Democratic Bulgaria (PP-DB)	307 849	13.92	39
Revival (Vazrazhdane, V)	295 915	13.38	38
Socialist Party (BSP)	151 560	6.85	19
There is such a people (Ima takuv narod, ITN)	128 007	5.79	16
Greatness (Velichie)	99 862	4.51	13
Other	225 337	12.1	0
None of the above	63 913	2.89	0

Source : <https://results.cik.bg/europe2024/rezultati/index.html>

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