European Elections monitor

The candidate of the present government, Tsetska Tsacheva falls behind in the first round of the Bulgarian presidential election.

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Results

Rumen Radev, supported by a voters' committee, but also candidate of the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) came out ahead in the first round of the presidential election that was organised on 6th November in Bulgaria. With 25.45% of the vote (according to still incomplete results) he came drew ahead of Tsetska Tsacheva, the candidate of the party of Prime Minister in office Boyko Borissov, (GERB) and the current leader of the National Assembly, the only chamber in the Bulgarian parliament, who won 21.97% of the vote.

Krassimir Karakachanov, candidate of the United Patriots coalition, which comprises the National Movement for the Salvation of Bulgaria, Ataka and the Bulgarian National Movement (VMRO) took third place in the election with 14.97% of the vote ahead of Dimiter Marinov, who won 11.18% of the vote; Traycho Traykov, candidate of the Reform Bloc (RB) won 6.63% of the vote and former Prime Minister (2013-2014) Plamen Oresharski, 5.87%[1]. On the announcement of the results the latter called for a vote in support of Rumen Radev in the second round of voting.

For the very first time it was obligatory to vote in Bulgaria even though the spokesperson of the Central Electoral Committee, Tsvetozar Tomov, had said on Nova TV that "*no sanctions would be taken against those who did not turn out to vote*". According political science professor Antony Todorov, the obligatory vote might turn in favour of the Socialist Party candidate. "*In small communities, which are traditionally more supportive of the socialists, voters voted en masse because they feared sanctions*," he declared.

Prime Minister Boyko Borissov announced that he would resign from office if the GERB candidate, Tsetska Tsacheva, did not win the presidential election in the first round (or if she did not come out ahead in the first round, since what he said was not always the same) and that he would convene a snap election so that his party (GERB) might "*recover his legitimacy*."

"*We shall wait for the final results. We are going to mobilise our forces in the second round of voting and I think that we have a chance of winning. If we lose we shall convene a snap election,"* maintained Boyko Borissov on the announcement of the initial results. "*If in the end the result is not a good one the head of government will keep his word,"* stressed Deputy Prime Minister Tomislav Donchev.

The first round of the presidential election marks the first "*defeat*" for the Boris Boyko's GERB, which is encouraging many political analysts' to forecast a snap election after the presidential election. "*It is a major setback for the party in office. If Ruman Radev wins the second round, which is highly likely, Bulgaria will enter into a new political cycle*," declared Parvan Simeono, political analyst of Gallup.

"*It is likely that the GERB will lose in the second round on 13th November which will lead to a government reshuffle and probably a snap election at the start of next year,"* indicated Kiril Avramov, a political expert of the New Bulgarian University. "*If the Prime Minister decides to stay as head of government he will need the support of more parties in parliament. I see no future for this type of government coalition, and the option of a snap election is the one I would privilege"* stressed Daniel Smilov, Director of the Liberal Strategies Centre in Sofia.

1. *http://results.cik.bg/pvrnr2016/tur1/president/index.html*

Whatever happens the second round on 13th November might be a tightly run race. Tsetska Tsacheva should have the support of the Reformist Bloc, whilst most voters supporting the "small" candidates are due to prefer the opposition candidate Rumen Radev.

"*The Bulgarians have said "no" to apathy and have voted for change*," declared Rumen Radev when the first results were announced. The former head of the air force campaigned using the mistrust of some of the population regarding the elites and their fear of immigrants.

"*For the first time geopolitics dominated the debate. Relations between Sofia and the EU and between Sofia and Moscow were challenged and there were debates over the management of the migratory crisis,"* declared Parvan Simeonov.

"*I will not allow Bulgaria to become Europe's refugee camp*," maintained the candidate who wants to strengthen the border between Bulgaria, Turkey and Greece in order to stem the flow of people fleeing the Middle East toward Europe. Rumen Radev also spoke in support of lifting the economic sanctions placed on Russia following the annexation of Crimea and its military intervention in the East of Ukraine. "*A necessary improvement in relations with Russia is not a regression in Euro-Atlantic relations,"* he indicated.

Against the candidate of change, Tsetska Tsacheva played the card of stability and promised to protect "*the European and Euro-Atlantic orientation of Bulgaria."*

The fight to counter poverty, the demographic crisis and the exodus of the population (more than one million people have left the country for economic reasons) comprised the other themes in the electoral campaign.

On the same day as the first round of the presidential election the Bulgarians were called to vote by referendum on 3 points in the recent reform of the electoral law[2]. 71.92% of the Bulgarians voted in support of the replacement of the proportional vote with a majority vote; 61.83%) said they supported the introduction of "obligatory voting" and 72.16% voted for the reduction of State subsidies granted to political parties.

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2. *http://results.cik.bg/pvrnr2016/tur1/referendum/index.html*