European Elections monitor

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RESULT

Boyko Borissov's "Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria" and Slavi Trifonov's "Such a People Exist" neck and neck after the parliamentary elections

Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB, which means "shield" in Bulgarian), led by former Prime Minister (2009-2013, 2014-2017 and 2017-2021) Boyko Borissov, and Such a People Exist (Ima takuv narod, ITN), a populist party founded by singer and TV presenter Slavi Trifonov finished in a tight race in the 11 July parliamentary elections in Bulgaria. ITN won 24.08% of the vote and 65 MPs, while GERB won 23.51% of the vote and 63 MPs. *The Socialist Party* (BSP) led by Korneliya Ninova took 13.51% of the vote, followed by the liberal coalition Democratic Bulgaria led by Hristo Ivanov, which includes 3 parties (Yes Bulgaria, Democrats for a Strong Bulgaria and the Greens), which won 12.56%. The *Movement for Rights and Freedoms* (DPS), a party representing the Turkish minority, led by Mustafa Karadayi, obtained 10.66% of the vote. Finally, the coalition *Get up Bulgaria ! Mafia, get out!* (Izpravi se BG! Moutri van!) of former ombudsman Maya Manolova and the *Poisoned Trio* (the name given by journalist Sasho Dikov to the trio comprising lawyer Nikolai Hadjigenov, sculptor Velislav Minekov and public relations specialist and former radio journalist Arman Babikyan) secured 5.06% of the vote and will be represented in the next National Assembly (Narodno sabranie), the only chamber of the Parliament. In total, 6 political parties were elected in this ballot, the results of which are not very different from those of last April 4. The parliament remains fragmented, with traditional parties and protest groups.

Turnout was low. It totalled 38.0%. There are several reasons for this: the holidays, the increase in the number of voting machines which may have discouraged some voters, especially the older ones, but also, and above all, the weariness of Bulgarians with their political class. Finally, the high abstention rate is also the result of a decline in vote buying according to Parvan Simeonov, director of the Gallup International Institute in Bulgaria.

General elections in Bulgaria

11th July 2021

Results of the 11 July 2021 parliamentary elections in Bulgaria

Turnout: 38.7%

Political Parties	Number of votes obtained	Percentage of votes cast
Such a people exist (Ima takuv narod, ITN)	657 829	24.08
Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria (GERB)	642 165	23.51
Socialist Party (BSP)	364 545	13.51
Democratic Bulgaria	338 963	12.56
Movement for rights and freedoms (DPS)	287 712	10.66
Get up Bulgaria ! Mafia, get out ! (Izpravi se BG! Moutri van!)	135 630	5.06

Source : https://results.cik.bg/pi2021_07/rezultati/index.html

The 11 July parliamentary elections were the second such vote in three months in Bulgaria. The previous one, held on 4 April, failed to produce a government majority. President of the Republic, Rumen Radev, had given a mandate to three personalities - Boyko Borissov, Slavi Trifonov and Kornelia Ninova - to form a government. But this was to no avail. These three failures paved the way for new elections.

Rumen Radev had in the meantime appointed a government of experts led by Stefan Yanev, Defence Advisor to the Head of State. He denounced the government's "*legally camouflaged corruption*". "*I am dismayed by the extent of bad practices. I did not expect it to be so dramatic,*" said Stefan Yanev, referring to "*attempts at sabotage*" by the administration.

Interior Minister Boyko Rashkov claimed that the previous government had wiretapped political party officials before the 4 April vote.

In a final blow to Borissov, on 2 June, under the Magnitsky Act, which freezes the assets in the United States of individuals and entities that the country deems suspicious and bans dollar transactions, Washington announced sanctions against 33 companies and 21 Bulgarian personalities, including businessmen Vasil Bozhkov and media tycoon Delian Peevski, a former GERB MP accused of controlling the party by influencing the appointment of officials like the Prosecutor General, "*their role in corruption*".

Some ministers also accused the government of awarding contracts (worth more than $5 billion) over the past 2 years without a competitive process. Economy Minister Kiril Petkov claimed that the state-controlled Bulgarian Development Bank, which aims to support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), had distributed €500 million in loans to just eight companies, owned by four people. Seven companies reportedly benefited in 2020 from €1.7 billion in public money, almost a quarter of the €7.1 billion earmarked for businesses. Kiril Petkov revealed that almost half of public contracts were awarded without tenders, that advances had been paid by the State to large companies for the construction of roads or dams when the work had not even started and the deadlines had expired.

"*These parliamentary elections are a political extension of the protest movement that the country has been experiencing for a year. It corresponds to the aspirations of society, which wants to put an end to the system of corruption that has gripped the country for the past 11 years,*" stressed Ivan Nachev, a political scientist at the New Bulgarian University. "*The election results confirm the transformation of the political landscape,*" said his colleague Antony Todorov, who said that the three protesting parties (*Such a People Exist, Democratic Bulgaria and Get up Bulgaria ! Mafia, get out!*) had to do everything possible to form a majority. "*If they give up now, it would be a disaster for them*", he said. The fact remains that these three parties will have to rely on another partner if they are to achieve the absolute majority that would allow them to govern.

Slavi Trifonov has always refused to ally himself with the traditional parties (GERB and the Socialist Party) which he describes as "*parties of the status quo*", as well as the Movement for Rights and Freedoms. However, he says he is ready to negotiate with the groups that took part in the protests in the summer of 2020[1], or *Democratic Bulgaria and Get up Bulgaria ! Mafia, get out!*

"*It is time to finish what we started and change the governance model completely*," said Slavi Trifonov after the results.

"*This time a government will be formed*," said Andrei Rachev. "*Bulgaria is lagging behind Europe in terms of justice and the fight against corruption. Today, people don't want that anymore, they want change. Bulgarians are becoming more European*," he added.

According to Boriana Dimitrova, director of the opinion institute Alpha Research, the future majority will be formed by a "*fragile and unstable coalition*". "*If the parties choose to call a new legislative election, they will be severely punished by the voters,*" said Julius Pavloff, director of the Centre for Analysis and Marketing in Sofia.

For now, the day after the legislative elections, we know who will not govern: GERB, too isolated, would not remain in power. But it is difficult to say who will govern the country.

Slavi Trifonov repeated that he did not want to be Prime Minister, even if his party won. "*Power is not an end in itself, I can be responsible without having a position*," he said. Similarly, Tochko Yordanov, number two of Such a People Exists, does not want to lead a future government. He said he wanted to avoid the formation of "*a cabinet with the rope around its neck that would expose it to being overthrown by the parliament at any moment". "To achieve a stable government, we must not exclude the possibility of a third or even a fourth parliamentary election,*" he added.

[1] *This followed a real estate scandal in March of the previous year in which several members of Citizens for European Development Bulgaria, including the Ministers of Justice, Sports, Energy and Culture, were involved.*

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