

Bulgarians go to the polls again on 11 July to elect their MPs

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ANALYSIS

3.4 million Bulgarians are again being called to the polls on 11 July to elect the 240 members of the National Assembly (*Narodno sabranie*), the single chamber of Parliament. The parliamentary elections of 4 April failed to produce a stable government majority.

The "Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria" (GERB), the party of outgoing Prime Minister Boyko Borisov, won 25.8% of the vote and 75 seats. "There is Such a People" (Ima takuv narod, ITN), a populist party founded by singer and TV presenter Slavi Trifonov, came second with 17.4% of the vote (51 seats). It was followed by Kornelia Ninova's Socialist Party (BSP), which secured 14.79% of the vote and 43 deputies; the "Movement for Rights and Freedoms" (DPS), a party representing the Turkish minority led by Mustafa Karadayi, secured 10.36% of the vote (30 seats); and the liberal Democratic Bulgaria coalition, comprising three parties (*Yes Bulgaria, the Democrats for a Strong Bulgaria and the Greens*), obtained 9.31% of the vote and 27 elected members. Finally, *Stand 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) won 4.65% of the vote, just above the 4% threshold to be represented in parliament, taking 14 seats.

Following the 4 April elections, President Rumen Radev gave a mandate to three people - outgoing Prime Minister Boyko Borisov, Slavi Trifonov and Kornelia Ninova - to form a government. All of them failed to do so. Boyko Borisov had called for the formation of a broad government of national unity, but his invitation went unanswered, as the five other parties that had won seats refused to join forces with him. The outgoing

Prime Minister called his rivals "cowards" accusing them of being "afraid" of taking office.

"Our party does not have the necessary number of deputies or partners to lead a stable government," said Slavi Trifonov, who refused any alliance with traditional parties. "The support offered to us comes from political factions that are harmful, greedy and proven to be compromised. What they are offering is not support but dependence," he said. Socialist Kornelia Ninova was no more fortunate in forming a government capable of running the country.

The failure to come to agreement paved the way for a new legislative election. Bulgarian electoral law provides for only three attempts to form a government after the elections. The president first assigns this responsibility to the leading party, then to the party that came second and finally to a party of his choice. In the event of a triple failure, the president appoints a caretaker government to manage current affairs and to call new elections within two months. Stefan Yanev, the head of State's defence adviser, was appointed to this post. The current political crisis is a first in the history of democratic Bulgaria.

18 political parties and 9 coalitions are participating in the 11 July elections (compared to 22 parties and 8 coalitions on 4 April). 791 polling stations will be opened in 68 countries outside the national territory for Bulgarians living abroad, compared to 464 during the previous elections. This increase is explained by the adoption of recent amendments to the Electoral Code which provide for the automatic opening of polling stations where at least 100 voters have fulfilled their civic duty in the last 5 years and the abolition of the 35-station limit in countries outside the European Union. The States that will host the largest number of polling

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stations are the UK (135), Turkey (112), Germany (117), Spain (67) and the USA (58).

The electoral law was also amended to generalise the use of voting machines in a bid to limit electoral fraud. The election campaign started on 11 June.

On 14 April, Boyko Borisov announced that he was not running for re-election. He justified his decision by saying that he did not want to "divide the nation", at the same time declaring that "there is no one more competent than him for this position". "I will submit the name of another Prime Minister, with a clear pro-European and pro-NATO orientation", he said. A few days later, it was reported that he had chosen Daniel Mitov, 43, former foreign minister from 2014 to 2017.

"The next Bulgarian Prime Minister must be the opposite of Boyko Borisov: speak foreign languages, be a graduate of a prestigious university, have professional expertise (...) I have been preparing for this for years and I am ready for anything that may happen to me," said Slavi Trifonov. In an interview with the national radio (BNR), he indicated that his political project was rooted in the national referendum of 6 November 2016. On that day, Bulgarians were asked to vote on three points of the electoral law reform. 71.92% of voters said "yes" to replacing proportional voting with majority voting; 61.83% were in favour of "compulsory voting" and 72.16% in favour of reducing public subsidies to parties.

Some 2.5 million people voted, but this was not enough, while only 12,000 more voters would have made the referendum binding. Slavi Trifonov denounced the result as a "monstrous fraud". Following the referendum, he decided to create his own party, "There is such a people". "I did not enter politics because I was dying to become a politician. I got involved because the whole political system refused to take into account the opinion of 3.5 million Bulgarians," he said.

He describes the concepts of "right" and "left" as obsolete; he also repeats that Bulgaria will always have an emotional attachment to Russia and will always be grateful to it for liberating the country from the Ottoman domination. However, he stressed that "Bulgaria's membership of the European Union and NATO is a good thing".

The National Movement (IMRO-BNM), the far-right party of Krasimir Karakatchanov, the National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria led by Valeri Simeonov, and Volya (Will), a right-wing populist party led by businessman Vesselin Mareshki, have formed an alliance for the 11 July parliamentary elections under the name *Bulgarian Patriots*. On the proposal of the chairman of the National Movement, each of the three leaders dropped their candidacy to overcome the internal struggles that had led to the break-up of *United Patriots*, the name of the coalition that rallied the National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria, the Bulgarian National Movement and, until 25 July 2019, Ataka (A), a right-wing populist party founded in 2005 and led by Volen Siderov. This alliance was GERB's partner in the outgoing government.

As for the left-wing opposition, the Alternative to Renewal (ABV), a party created by former president of the Republic (2002-2012) Georgi Parvanov after he was expelled from the Socialist Party (BSP) in 2014, and Normal State, created by another former socialist Georgi Kadiev, who was expelled from the party in 2015, pledged to support the Socialist Party's electoral programme for the 11 July vote.

Within the BSP, several members have grouped together in a platform, "21st Century Socialism". They are calling for the resignation of Chairwoman Kornelia Ninova and the National Council after the next legislative elections.

According to all political analysts, the result of the parliamentary elections of 11 July is not likely to be different from that of 4 April: the next Bulgarian parliament is expected to be fragmented, bringing together traditional parties and protest movements. "These new parliamentary elections are likely to result in a parliament that is just as fragmented, if not more so, because there are deep disagreements within society," said Antony Galabov, a political analyst.

According to the opinion poll conducted by the Trend Institute between 11 and 18 June for the daily 24 Hours, six political parties are set to be represented in the next parliament. GERB is expected to come out ahead with 21.7% of the vote, closely followed by There is Such a People, which is projected to win 20.2%. The BSP is due to come third with 16.1%; the Democratic Bulgaria

coalition is forecast to win 11.2%; the Movement for Rights and Freedoms, 10.9% and Stand-Up Bulgaria! Mafia, Get out! (Izpravi se BG! Moutri van!), 5%.

Dimitar Ganev, a political analyst at the Trend Institute, considers that the battle for first place will be tightly run between the GERB-UFD coalition and There is Such a People, as will the fourth place between Democratic Bulgaria and the Movement for Rights and Freedoms.

According to him, this last "battle" could be played out abroad, with both parties counting on the vote of Bulgarians living outside the country. Finally, Dimitar Ganev thinks that the three "protest" parties (There is Such a People, Democratic Bulgaria and Stand-up Bulgaria! Mafia, Get Out!) have little chance of obtaining a majority, but they could nevertheless succeed in forming a government with the support of the Socialist Party and the Movement for Rights and Freedoms.

Reminder of the results of the 4 April 2021 parliamentary elections in Bulgaria

Turnout: 49.1%

Political Parties	Number of votes obtained	Percentage of votes cast	Number of seats
Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria (GERB)	837 707	25.80	75
Such People Exist (Ima takuv narod, ITN)	565 014	17.40	51
Socialist Party (BSP)	480 146	14.79	43
Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS)	336 306	10.36	30
Democratic Bulgaria	302 280	9.31	27
Stand up Bulgaria! Mafia, Get Out! (Izpravi se BG! Moutri van!)	150 940	4.65	14
Others	661 604	17.69	0

Source : <https://results.cik.bg/pi2021/rezultati/index.html>

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