

# Boyko Borissov's GERB comes first in Bulgaria's general elections but is not guaranteed to govern

The fourth general elections and still no clear way out of the political crisis in which Bulgaria has found itself for over two years. The Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB), led by former Prime Minister (2009-2013, 2014-2017 and 2017-2021) Boyko Borissov, came out ahead in the 2 October general elections in Bulgaria with 25.36% of the vote. They were followed by 'We continue the Change', the coalition of former Prime Minister (2021-2022) Kiril Petkov, which secured 20.20%. The Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS), a party representing the Turkish-speaking minority and led by Mustafa Karadayi, took third place with 13.71%. It was followed by Renaissance (Vazrazhdane, V), a nationalist party, in favour of Bulgaria's exit from the European Union and NATO and a rapprochement of the country with Russia, led by Kostadin Kostanidov, which registered strong gains with 10.17%, and by the Socialist Party (BSP), led by Korneliya Ninova, which won 9.31%.

Democratic Bulgaria, a liberal coalition of Yes Bulgaria, the Democrats for a Strong Bulgaria and the Greens, led by Hristo Ivanov, came in 6th with 7.45%. Finally, Bulgaria Rise (BV), a party founded by Stefan Yanev, former Prime Minister of an expert government (May-December 2021) and Minister of Defence (December 2021-March 2022), dismissed by Kiril Petkov because of his lukewarm support for Ukraine, entered the Assembly (Narodno sabranie), the single chamber of Parliament with 4.62%. With 7 political parties, the next Bulgarian parliament will be as fragmented as the previous one.

Turnout was very low, partly due to election fatigue after four general elections (and one presidential election) in 18 months. Only a quarter of Bulgarians went to the polls (25.58%), which is -12.85 points compared to the previous general elections of 14 November 2021.

**Results of the 2 October 2022 general elections in Bulgaria**

Turnout: 25.58%

Political Parties	% of votes won
<b>Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria (GERB)</b>	25.36
<b>We continue the change</b>	20.20
<b>Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS)</b>	13.71
<b>Renaissance (V)</b>	10.17
<b>Socialist Party (BSP)</b>	9.31
<b>Democratic Bulgaria</b>	7.45
<b>Bulgaria Rise (BV)</b>	4.62
<b>Others</b>	9.18

Source : [Bulgarian Electoral Commission](#)

The general elections of 2 October confirm the continued popularity of Boyko Borissov who has promised his compatriots to "defeat chaos and work for the country's stability" during his last meeting in Plovdiv, Bulgaria's second largest city located in the country's south. However, it will be very difficult for GERB to form a government majority, as almost all parties have declared that they do not want to join forces with Boyko Borissov's party. GERB might consider working with the Movement for Rights and Freedoms and Renaissance, "a mathematically possible but socially unacceptable coalition," said Boriana Dimitrova, director of the Alpha Research opinion institute, given the major differences between these three parties.

Boyko Borissov called on the politicians to reason and declared himself open to all those who "want to defend Bulgaria's place in the European Union and within NATO". "In the face of this aggression, in the face of this war in which Vladimir Putin is clearly the aggressor - I have nothing against the Russian people -, with this farce that are the referendums organised in Donbas, Bulgaria must be very clear, categorical and precise as to its place in the European Union and in NATO," he declared.

"The challenge is to choose between a European, progressive and transparent Bulgaria and a return to the years of political corruption," Kiril Petkov repeated

during the campaign. He was not entirely heard. "We continue the change' and its allies, the Socialist Party and Democratic Bulgaria will not have enough deputies to form a government," declared Boriana Dimitrova when the results were announced. Kiril Petkov refused any alliance with Boyko Borissov who, in his eyes, embodies "Bulgaria's corrupt past".

The invasion of Ukraine by the Russian armed forces on 24 February 2022 considerably shook the government formed by Kiril Petkov, which was strongly divided on the support to be given to Kyiv, with the Socialist Party, for example, opposing any delivery of arms to Ukraine. 'We continue the Change' strongly condemned Moscow and stood by Ukraine. The Prime Minister refused to open a rouble account to pay for his gas deliveries. As a result, Russia cut off gas supplies to Bulgaria, which imports 90% of its gas from its eastern neighbour. This decision led to a complete breakdown in relations between Prime Minister Kiril Petkov and the President of the Republic of Bulgaria, Rumen Radev. GERB saw the government's divisions as an opportunity and tabled a motion of no confidence in Kiril Petkov's coalition, pointing to the sharp rise in energy prices and denouncing "the failure of the government's economic and financial policy". The government collapsed following the vote on this motion on 22 June, a first in Bulgaria's history: 123 MPs voted for the motion of no confidence and 116 opposed it.

Kiril Petkov's condemnation of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, his refusal to pay for Russian gas in roubles, which led to Moscow stopping gas deliveries, and the expulsion of dozens of Russian diplomats have also divided the Bulgarian population. "Bulgaria is torn between nostalgia for the USSR on the one hand and the attraction of the European Union and modernity on the other," summarises political scientist Georgi Kiriakov. "The war in Ukraine has caused a new split in Bulgarian politics, between pro-Europeans and pro-Atlantists on one side and pro-Russians on the other. Some political parties are exploiting the traditionally favourable position of Bulgarians towards Russia and are thus seeking to attract new voters," said Dimitar Ganev, a sociologist at the Trend Research Center. "It is prices that concern voters, much more than

*the geostrategic issues that agitate the parties,"* said Antony Todorov, professor of political science at the New Bulgarian University. "In previous legislative elections, the division was over the model of governance of the last ten years embodied by former Prime Minister Boyko Borissov and his party. This time, the main issues are stability and keeping prices low, and dealing with the consequences of the war. The main division in the country is now between East and West rather than between the status quo and change," said Parvan Simeonov, a political analyst with the Gallup International opinion-polling institute.

If the general elections fail to form a stable government, a new election will have to be held in 2023, a catastrophic prospect in a context of high inflation and economic stagnation.

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