

Bulgaria Watch: New government this time?

The third parliamentary elections in 2021 will more likely lead to formation of new government, given the punitive vote for the parties that failed to agree after the previous two elections. Most likely, the current president Radev will win a second mandate on November 21.

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The second snap elections - more promising

During the COVID-19 dominated 2021 Bulgaria fell into political crisis. The reason roots in dissatisfaction of the population with the government and development of the country in recent years. As a result of the separation in society no government could be formed after the regular parliamentary elections on April 4 and the snap elections on July 11, 2021. The — back then — new political party ITN of the TV showman Stanislav Trifonov, being the second (on 4 April) and the first (on 11 July) strongest parliamentary fraction, had the potential to form a government. However, due to a lack of clear political strategy and experience they could not cope with this strategic national task.

After the early elections on July 11, two ministers (Economy and Finance) of the caretaker government, Kiril Petkov and Asen Vassilev, initiated a new political party “We continue the change” (liberal, pro-European) and ran in the second early elections on November 14. They won with, 25.7% of the vote, followed by the GERB party of the former prime minister Boyko Borissov with 22.7%, and the DPS party of the Turkish minority with 13%. The Socialists (BSP) were pushed back, taking the fourth place. For the first time, ITN received only 9.5%, and the “Democratic Bulgaria” party (DB, EPP Member) took the sixth place with 6.4%. The ultra-nationalist and anti-vaxer party “Revival” (PV) succeeded in jumping over the 4-percent barrier and entered the parliament with 4.9%.

The two Harvard graduates Petkov and Vassilev initiated talks with all parliamentary parties, except for GERB and DPS, which will take place publicly in working groups shaped on the governing policies. The groups are expected to outline the future coalition partners, to work out an agreement on the governance program, and to specify the composition of the new government. “We continue the change” stated that the urgent unpopular reforms in the judiciary, energy, health care, etc. can be held only by a coalition with a majority in the parliament (121 M.P. out of 240).

Theoretically in the new, more fragmented, parliament (7 parties) a coalition of 4 parties with 134 M.P. seems to be stable in the medium term: “We continue the change” (67 M.P.) + BSP (26) + ITN (25) + DB (16).

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Whether and which coalition will be established is difficult to predict since the results of the talks in the working groups are highly unpredictable. The parties state they are willing to reach an agreement given the results of the two previous elections. Of course, these positions increase the likelihood of reaching an agreement. However, against the background of relatively low coalition culture in the country forming a new government is by far not guaranteed.

Although the November 14 parliamentary elections coincided with the regular presidential elections the turnout was at a record low level of about 40% for both elections. On the presidential elections the current president Rumen Radev won 49.4% of the vote. Although the next candidate, Anastas Gerdjikov, gathered only 22.8%, they both are due to run in a second round on November 21. Radev is likely to win the runoff, however, this is still not a fact, because opposing political parties stood behind the two candidates extending the party race to the presidential elections.

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