

# Right-wing minority government formed in Bulgaria

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The formation of a far-right minority government led by Prime Minister Boyko Borisov and his party, Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria (GERB), will intensify the crisis in the European Union's (EU) poorest member state. In the coalition agreement, the new government has set its goals as the rescue of the banking system and wide-ranging reforms in the education and health care systems. The new cabinet will be Bulgaria's fifth within two years.

Along with GERB, the new government includes the Reform Block, an alliance of five arch-conservative and neo-liberal free market parties, as well as the Alternative for the Rebirth of Bulgaria (ABV), a split-off from the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP). It will be supported by the Patriotic Front, a newly-founded party which controls 19 seats in parliament.

Borisov led the Bulgarian government from 2009 to 2013 but was compelled to resign after large demonstrations developed last February in virtually all major cities against bitter poverty and sharp energy price rises.

The country has been in permanent political crisis ever since. Two technocratic governments, and one dominated by the BSP and finance expert Plamen Oresharski did not last long. He resigned after 15 months in office due to conflicts with Brussels over the EU's confrontational course towards Russia, which Sofia was not prepared to unconditionally support.

The utter bankruptcy of the left and liberal forces explains why the GERB with its discredited leader Borisov could emerge from the latest elections as the strongest party. "Bulgaria is going around in circles," commented Klaus Schrameyer, a former German diplomat in Sofia, to Deutsche Welle. "Due to the lack of a political alternative, the electorate has no real choice in elections."

This is exactly how it is. The most significant result from the early elections was the low turnout of 49 percent. GERB obtained a third of votes cast. The party of the new prime minister was thus backed by only one-in-six eligible voters. In 1990, close to 90 percent of those eligible to vote participated in the parliamentary elections.

Since then, right and left bourgeois governments have taken turns in power, preparing the way for EU membership through the destruction of the state education and health care systems, the privatisation and liberalisation of state-run industry, and essential public services. In 1997, with the agreement of all parties in parliament, a currency council was introduced, which handed direct control over economic, financial and social policy to the international banks. By joining the EU in 2007, Bulgaria subordinated itself fully to the austerity dictates of Brussels, the IMF and the World Bank.

The BSP, which has its origins in the former Stalinist state party, is in an advanced stage of decomposition. Under the leadership of its former chairman and Bulgarian President Parvanov, the ABV split. At the election, it won 4.2 percent of the vote and 11 seats in parliament. The BSP's vote dropped by 11.2 percent, meaning it secured only 15.4 percent.

The composition of the new government and its reliance on the votes of the fascist Patriotic Front shows its right-wing character. The Patriotic Front is made up of the National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria, a split from the extreme right-wing Ataka party, which is also represented in parliament, and the Bulgarian National Movement, which is notorious for attacks on Roma and non-orthodox religious communities.

Borisov ruled out a coalition with the BSP and the party of the Turkish minority (DPS) prior to the

election by conducting an aggressive campaign against the alleged pro-Moscow stance of the BSP and corruption and criminality within the DPS.

Interim Prime Minister Georgi Blisnashki, who has been pursuing a pro-EU policy since he left the BSP in March, declared to Reuters, “After the parliamentary elections, Bulgaria needs a strong government to continue with the radical reforms so that the country can be pulled out of the post-Communist swamp.”

Borisov has retained several government ministers appointed by Blisnashki who are pursuing a pro-EU line. Valentin Poryazov and Rumen Alexandrov will remain, as deputy foreign ministers. Both have enjoyed a long career in EU circles, and are to impose a firmer stance towards Russia.

The minister for European affairs will be former EU commissioner Meglena Kuneva of the Reform Block. The finance minister will be Kiril Ananiev, who has held senior posts in various governments virtually continuously since 1998 and was heavily involved in the austerity programmes which prepared Bulgaria’s EU membership.

The radical reforms being planned by the new government will have dire consequences for the population. Currently, one-in-five Bulgarians already live below the official poverty line. Average pensions stand at €100. The economic crisis is being worsened by the countermeasures taken by Russia in response to EU sanctions. Last month, the IMF revised its growth projections for Bulgaria downwards.

A sustained suicide wave which began in 2013 shows the scale of the social tragedy. Since last year, 20 people alone have set themselves alight. In Sandanski in October, a man surviving only with the help of church donations, set fire to himself in protest against his poverty. An unemployed photographer at a loss as to how she could feed her child followed suit in front of the presidential palace in Sofia two days later.

A resident of Misia, a town where thousands lost their homes due to floods in the summer, said, “no-one will vote. What’s the point? So that we suffer and they live?”

The younger generation, if they are able to, are trying their luck in other countries. Since the collapse of the Stalinist regime in 1990, Bulgaria has lost over 12 percent of its population.

The money obtained from social cuts is flowing to

prop up the country’s failed banks. The government presented a four-point programme to save the “oligarch bank” KTB with state intervention. The bank, which has been closed for four months, supposedly has a shortfall of €2 billion.



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