

# Shift to right following election in Bulgaria

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Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (Gerb), the right-wing conservative party led by Bojko Borissov, won the early parliamentary election held in Bulgaria on Sunday. The previous head of government will now strive for an alliance with other right-wing and far right forces.

The third parliamentary election in the last four years was called when Borissov resigned as head of government in the middle of last year after Rumen Radew, the candidate of the Socialist Party (BSP), won the country's presidential election.

According to the electoral commission, 32.6 of Bulgarians voted for Gerb. The BSP, which had been head-to-head with Gerb in the polls, landed well behind with 27.1 percent.

The outcome of the election on Sunday will further exacerbate the political crisis in Bulgaria. It is very unlikely that Gerb can form a stable government with the other right wing parties. Neither is the BSP expected to be able to form a functioning coalition given the massive clash of conflicts which characterise Bulgarian politics.

A major issue is the country's relationship towards the EU and Russia. The election last year of Radew as president was regarded as a step towards Russia. Radew and the BSP chairman Kornelia Ninova demand an end to the EU sanctions against Russia plus closer cooperation with Moscow. Borissov on the other hand is an adamant supporter of the EU.

The likelihood of Borissov becoming premier a third time - he was already prime minister from 2009 to 2013, as well as from 2014 to 2016 - can only be explained by the complete discrediting of the BSP. The successor party to Bulgaria's Stalinist ruling party had carried out a policy of mass privatization and ruined the country's economy after the collapse of Stalinist rule. Under Borissov the country then joined the EU. As a result, the Balkan state is listed as the poorest country

in the EU.

Bulgaria's per capita economic output is currently less than half the EU average. Although last year's economic growth was over three per cent, the IMF is forecasting a fall to a maximum of 2.5 percent in coming years. Wages, which in Bulgaria average about 300 euros a month, are much lower than even in neighbouring, poverty stricken Romania.

The catastrophic conditions in the country are driving young, better-educated people abroad. Between 1990 and 2012, the population decreased by around twelve percent.

A "grand coalition" between Gerb and BSP has been ruled out by both sides. The vote for the pro-western Reformers Bloc, the last government partner of Gerb, fell from nine to three percent and it failed to enter parliament. For this reason, Borissov is now seeking an alliance with ultra-right parties. The third ranking party in the new parliament is the alliance of United Patriots (VP), consisting of three extreme right parties.

Last week this grouping blocked the Bulgarian-Turkish border to prevent Turks with dual citizenship, and therefore have the right to vote in Bulgaria, from entering the country. The police did not intervene.

The IMRO (Bulgarian National Movement), the largest organization within the United Patriots nationalist electoral alliance, is the successor of an organization which has used terrorist means for decades for the purpose of establishing a "great Bulgaria" through the annexation of Macedonia. The "National Front for the Rescue of Bulgaria," which emerged from the Ataka party in 2011, also part of United Patriots, openly propounds fascist and racist positions.

Krassimir Karakachanov, the chairman of IMRO, calls for the use of firearms against refugees at the country's borders and openly advocates violence against the Roma living in the country. He regards Bulgaria as a front-line state against Islamism. It should

be noted that Borissov, who recently declared the Balkans was on the brink of war, is now considering forming a government with an openly fascist party.

Gerb and the BSP also conducted campaigns against Turks during the election campaign.

Following internal conflicts, the party of the Turkish minority, the DSP, which participated in several governments, broke apart last year. Democrats for Responsibility (DOST), which emerged from the breakup, supports the authoritarian course of Turkish President Erdogan.

Gerb and the BSP reject any coalition with the rest of the DSP, which won nine percent of the vote and therefore has seats in the new parliament.

Another potential alliance partner for Gerb is the new party Volya, headed by Weselin Mareschki, who describes himself as an anti-establishment candidate in the manner of Donald Trump. It received just over four percent of the vote.

Like his American role model, Mareschki owns a business empire, mainly in the fields of medicine and energy. He declared his readiness to form a coalition with Gerb or the Socialists, as long as they fulfilled his demands for massive tax cuts and the complete privatization of the Bulgarian economy.



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