

Bulgaria's parliamentary election returns Radev's Progressive Bulgaria with an absolute majority

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Parliamentary elections in Bulgaria held on April 19 returned former President Rumen Radev's Progressive Bulgaria (PB) as the clear victor, with almost 44 percent (43.91 percent) of the vote. PB will hold 130 seats in the 240-seat National Assembly. Progressive Bulgaria was established in March as a coalition of three smaller existing parties, described as being on the "left" wing of the political establishment, specifically as a vehicle for Radev's electoral project. It only formally became a unified political party on April 17. Radev resigned the presidency in January, one year before the end of his term, in order to run in the elections.

This result gives Progressive Bulgaria an absolute majority and will allow Radev to form a government without the need for an alliance.

The snap elections come after the coalition government of GERB and the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) resigned in the wake of mass protests in December against its proposed 2026 state budget. The draft budget was supposed to be the country's first budget in euros, with Bulgaria joining the eurozone on January 1, 2026. The budget entailed a massive expansion of the security apparatus and a record debt ceiling fueled by military credits.

GERB, headed by three-time prime minister Boyko Borissov, saw its vote decline sharply from 25.52 percent in the last elections to 13.18 percent and will hold 39 seats in the new Assembly, down from 66. The Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS), a party traditionally associated with the Turkish ethnic minority vote, took 7.01 percent of the vote, down from 11.13 percent, and will have 21 seats. DPS has become increasingly associated with systemic corruption in the country, exemplified by its leader, the oligarch Delyan Peevski.

The Continue the Change–Democratic Bulgaria (PP-

DB) coalition received 12.42 percent and will have 37 seats, making it the only party already in parliament that did not lose seats. The coalition is described in the European press as the "technocratic" and "anti-corruption" wing of the "pro-European" parties, in contrast to GERB, which is widely despised among the population and associated with corruption scandals.

The vote for the fascistic Revival party fell from 12.92 percent to just above the 4 percent threshold for entering parliament, at 4.19 percent, giving it 13 MPs. The post-Stalinist BSP and its electoral alliance, United Left, saw their vote collapse from an already historic low of 7 percent to below the electoral threshold.

The vote, with a turnout of 50.2 percent, relatively high for Bulgaria, represents above all a broad rejection of the traditional political establishment. GERB had been the leading political party in the country since 2009, while the BSP has been left outside parliament for the first time since the restoration of capitalism.

Radev is being described in Western media as "pro-Russian" because of his verbal misgivings about the war against Russia in Ukraine. His election-night declaration that he hoped for "practical relations with Russia, based on mutual respect and equal treatment" has reinforced his portrayal as President Vladimir Putin's next "Trojan horse," after Hungary's former president Viktor Orbán and Slovakia's Prime Minister Robert Fico.

Radev has himself cultivated an ambivalent attitude toward the war in order to appeal to widespread anti-war sentiment in Bulgarian society. His campaign projected the image of a moderate figure, opposed to the worst excesses of EU-imposed austerity and war preparations.

Exit poll data presented by *Novinite* showed that two-thirds (67 percent) of voters who had sat out the previous parliamentary elections backed Progressive Bulgaria this

time. Progressive Bulgaria was especially successful among young voters, with 34 percent of Bulgarians aged 18-30 years casting their ballots for Radev's project, making it the dominant choice among young people by a significant margin.

That Radev was able to benefit from widespread discontent is due in no small part to the active or tacit support of many figures from the collapsing BSP and the pseudo-left formations that traditionally gravitated around it.

Vanya Grigorova, a former union bureaucrat who was the focus of a pseudo-left bid for the Sofia mayoralty in 2023 and leader of Solidarity Bulgaria, said in January, in the run-up to the election: "I strongly hope that Radev's formation will be left-leaning and based on solidarity. But I will give him time to develop his vision. I won't start with criticisms just yet. For me, it's important to see concrete policies—for example, in the pension system." Radev also received, and expressed thanks for, the support of the fascistic VMRO–Bulgarian National Movement party.

The character of the next administration can be glimpsed from Radev's political past and his presidential terms.

A high-ranking military aviation officer, Radev completed extensive training courses in the United States as part of a generation of officers orienting the Bulgarian military toward US imperialism. His political rise in 2016 was tied to the post-Stalinist BSP and its increasing adoption of extreme right-wing positions. In a process that took place throughout Europe, Radev and the BSP normalized and elevated the fascistic anti-refugee positions of street groups such as Ataka.

In a period of intensifying international crisis, Radev emerged as an important political anchor for the Bulgarian ruling class.

While maintaining a rivalry with Boyko Borissov that took the form of an at times bitter struggle over control of the state security apparatus, Radev and GERB worked in tandem on the critical interests of the Bulgarian bourgeoisie.

Radev was a key opponent of public health measures to control the spread of COVID-19 and supported the "reopening" of the Bulgarian economy, a policy that led to catastrophic results, with Bulgaria registering one of the world's highest mortality rates, at roughly 548 deaths per 100,000 people.

Radev and Borissov also worked in tandem and in close collaboration with the EU powers to press Bulgaria's

irredentist ambitions in North Macedonia's EU accession talks. The EU has likewise been heavily involved in the widespread mistreatment of refugees along the so called "Balkan route."

Radev maintained an ostensibly critical attitude toward the war against Russia, most recently in March, when he called a security cooperation agreement signed by the government with Ukraine "a risk to national security." The truth is that Bulgaria has remained a principal supplier of Soviet-style equipment to Ukraine throughout his terms as president.

He has repeatedly called for the expansion of European and Bulgarian military production facilities, whose growth in recent years has been tied to the war against Russia.

Throughout the last year, Radev has been a vocal critic of the last GERB government and its draft budget, calling for a referendum on the introduction of the euro. At the same time, throughout the election campaign, he insisted that any future government would have to abide by the same "fiscally responsible" budget policies that have devastated Bulgarian society in the years leading up to the introduction of the euro.

In his election victory declaration, Radev stated, "We have defeated apathy" and that "This is only the first step toward restoring trust and the social contract." He is, however, fundamentally incapable of and unwilling to resolve any of the issues that have provoked mass protests in recent years.

Neither the advanced war preparations, nor the attacks on living standards that accompany them, nor even the "state capture" by the oligarchs are uniquely Bulgarian phenomena. Workers and youth will soon confront a Radev administration determined to defend the interests of the imperialist powers and the Bulgarian ruling class. The way forward lies through the international class struggle and the founding of a Bulgarian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI).



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