

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM BULGARIA'S SNAP PARLIAMENTARY & EU ELECTIONS

Possible forward scenarios after Bulgaria's double elections

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Seven political parties are on course to enter Bulgaria's parliament after the country held snap parliamentary elections on 9th June, marking the fifth snap electoral contest since 2021 amidst deepening political instability and voter fatigue.

With an historically low turnout, the centre-right GERB-SDS of former PM Boyko Borissov finished first, securing 25% of the votes. The GERB-allied and Turkish minority Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS) of US-sanctioned MP Delyan Peevski has usurped GERB's main electoral rival, the centrist and pro-EU We Continue the Change-Democratic Bulgaria coalition (PP-DB). Support for PP-DB is now roughly equal to that of the far-right and pro-Russian revival, while the left-wing Bulgarian Socialist Party recorded its lowest electoral result in Bulgaria's democratic history. They are followed by the populist There is Such a Nation (ITN) with 6%, while Grandeur, another pro-Russian formation, also passed the 4% threshold to enter parliament.

Following the elections, PP-DB indicated that they will go into opposition, leaving only two possible scenarios. Aretera's baseline scenario assumes a government supported by GERB, the DPS and potentially ITN. Such a coalition would likely continue with supporting Bulgaria's EU integration objectives, including efforts to enter the Eurozone and fully join the Schengen Area.

Should these parties fail to garner a functioning majority of MPs, Bulgaria's seemingly endless election cycle will continue, potentially with yet another snap parliamentary election in the autumn. This would mean Bulgaria would continue to be governed by a caretaker government, appointed by President Rumen Radev, while pro-Russian formations could gain more ground going forward.

 Below, Aretera takes deeper look at the aftermath of Bulgaria's double elections, outlining the political and policy impact, as well as the likely forward scenarios.

POST-ELECTION LANDSCAPE

Seven political parties are on course to enter the 50th convocation of Bulgaria's National Assembly following the country's latest snap parliamentary elections – the fifth snap electoral contest in three years. The snap election comes after the informal coalition government – supported by the centre-right GERB-SDS of former PM Boyko Borissov and the centrist We Continue the Change-Democratic Bulgaria alliance (PP-DB) – collapsed in March due to political disagreements.

In line with Aretera's pre-election forecast¹, Borissov's GERB finished first with nearly 25% of the popular vote. The main rival PP-DB has sunk to third place, usurped by the Turkish minority Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS) of US sanctioned MP Delyan Peevski, which secured an unexpectedly high 17% of votes. The PP-DB has lost half of its electorate, marking one of the most important changes in comparison with the previous snap elections. PP-DB is now just narrowly ahead of the pro-Russian Revival, which secured 13.8%.

In addition, three other formations will enter the Bulgarian parliament. These include the left-wing BSP for Bulgaria, the populist There is Such a Nation movement of celebrity Slavi Trifonov and the pro-Russian/far-right Grandeur party. BSP scored its lowest result ever recorded, while Grandeur's emergence as yet another pro-Russian formation is one of the most important takeaways from this snap electoral contest.

ELECTION RESULTS

EU & Snap Parliamentary Election Results Breakdown				
Party/Alliance	Popular Vote – Snap Election (%)	Number of MPs	Popular Vote – EU Election (%)	Number of MEPs
GERB-SDS (centre-right, pro-EU)	24.7	68	24	5
DPS (Turkish minority, centrist, pro-EU)	17.1	47	14.7	3
PP-DB (multi-party alliance, pro-EU)	14.3	39	14.5	3
Revival (far-right nationalist, pro-Kremlin)	13.8	38	14	3
BSP for Bulgaria (centre-left, Kremlin-leaning)	7.1	19	7	2
ITN (populist, social conservative)	6%	16	6	1
Grandeur (far-right, pro-Russian)	4.7%	13	4	0
Total		240		17

Source: National Election Commission of Bulgaria.

¹ [See here for our pre-election overview of Bulgaria's snap elections from June 4](#)

The results of Bulgaria's EU elections, held in parallel on 9th June, largely mirror those of the snap parliamentary election, with all aforementioned parties on course to send MEPs to Brussels, except for Grandeur. Of the 17 MEP seats allocated for Bulgaria, GERB will have five, losing one seat in comparison with 2019. The DPS and PP-DB secured three seats each, while the Revival is a new entrant, also with three MEPs. The BSP has lost five seats and is down to two MEPs, while ITN will also enter the EU Parliament for the first time, with one MEP. As for the newcomers, ITN is expected to join the national-conservative ECR Group, while Revival expressed interest in forming a new EU parliamentary group with Germany's AfD.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE DOUBLE ELECTIONS

The snap elections held on 9th June were the sixth parliamentary electoral contest since April 2021. The deepening political crisis and the inability of parliamentary parties to form a stable and durable government has resulted in the lowest turnout in parliamentary elections in Bulgaria since 1990 (34%), with only 2.3 million voters participating in the vote. Parties with a stable electorate accordingly secured a better result, while passing the 4% threshold required a significantly lower number of votes, contributing to Grandeur's success.

The main far-right/pro-Russian Revival won fewer votes compared to the previous elections, but due to the low turnout they will obtain more seats in parliament, as well as three seats in the EU Parliament for the first time. In addition, Grandeur's leaders, entering the Bulgarian parliament for the first time, have openly demonstrated pro-Russian positions in the past, including protests against sending military aid to Ukraine.

Borissov's GERB secured a certain victory with more than 10% more than their main rival and formal coalition partner PP-DB. Together with the historically high result of the Peevski-led DPS (17%), this secured the expected electoral comeback of the status-quo parties and the loss of support for the largest anti-corruption and reformist coalition (PP-DB). GERB and DPS now will work towards forming a formal or informal coalition and a minority government. Either way, the results indicate that they will not be able to create a governing majority on their own and will need to work with at least one smaller parliamentary group, most likely ITN.

POSSIBLE FORWARD SCENARIOS

Following the elections, the leaders of PP-DB have indicated they will be a "constructive opposition" in the next parliament. This means that the probability of them taking part in the next government with GERB is very low. This leaves Bulgaria with only two possible scenarios: a government supported by GERB, DPS and one of the smaller parliamentary groups, or yet another snap election.

GERB leader Boyko Borissov stated that he will work towards forming an expert government dominated by GERB. His party will start negotiations with the rest of the parliamentary parties after the new parliament is sworn in. DPS leader Delyan Peevski also indicated that he will work towards the formation of a government with the first mandate. The statements of the leaders of the two largest political formations strongly suggest a successful formation of a government majority in the new parliament. A less likely but still possible scenario is that negotiations will be unsuccessful, most likely due to Borissov's demonstrated reluctance to openly and formally work with the US-sanctioned Peevski. Accordingly, new snap elections may be called, most likely for the autumn.

POLITICAL IMPACT

Depending on the outcome of the upcoming coalition talks, there are two main political impacts that need to be considered for Bulgaria's short-term political future. If GERB manages to secure a government majority in parliament, the country will more or less continue on the same centrist political path of further European integration, aiming to join the Eurozone and fully join the Schengen Area, as well as to support EU and NATO policies on Ukraine. This also depends on the smaller political party that will have to join the governing majority together with GERB and DPS, but a turn towards Russia would be unlikely under this scenario, since DPS leader Delyan Peevski is focusing on building his Euro-Atlantic reputation and supporting Ukraine (to remove himself from the US list of sanctioned officials under the country's Global Magnitsky Act).

If government negotiations fail and new snap elections are called, the current interim government will most likely continue. In this case, all legislation would be voted on by ad hoc coalitions in the next convocation of parliament. This may cause delays when it comes to Bulgaria's acceptance into the Eurozone and the Land Schengen Area, as well as uncertainty when it comes to support for Ukraine. The largest risk under this scenario is that a deepening political crisis might see stronger support for far-right and pro-Russian formations, such as Revival and Grandeur, leading to a more Eastward foreign policy. There are also expectations that incumbent Bulgarian President Rumen Radev, who has also been Kremlin-leaning in his statements regarding the war in Ukraine, is working on forming his own political party. This would be a significant political development as polls suggest Radev has the highest support among all politicians in Bulgaria.


POLICY IMPACT

Even though the legitimacy of a potential GERB-DPS government may come under criticism due to the historically low turnout, a new, GERB-led cabinet has the chance to put an end to Bulgaria's enduring political crisis, even if only temporarily, while also maintaining Bulgaria's Euro-Atlantic orientation and working towards entering the Eurozone and fully joining the Schengen Area.

A new and democratically elected government would lead to a more stable policy-making process and thus a more reliable business and investment environment. However, critics argue that such a government should not be expected to be effective in the fight against corruption and state and media capture. After new amendments to the Constitution, the new government will be expected to vote on the new Judicial System Act, which should reform the judiciary. Taking into account alleged networks of influence held by GERB and DPS over the current judicial system, it can be expected that the reform will not effectively assist the ongoing fight against corruption.

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