

100 DAYS OF BORISOV'S CABINET. TRANSPARENT POLITICAL STYLE AND PRONOUNCED TURN TO THE WEST

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The central political event of 2009 in Bulgaria was the parliamentary election of July 5, from which the GERB party, led by former mayor of Sofia, Boyko Borisov, emerged victorious with 39.71 percent of the vote and 116 seats in the 240 seat National Assembly. At the same time the party fell agonizingly short of the absolute majority, which is set at 121 seats. Borisov was able relatively quickly to form a minority cabinet, which, after the first 100 days in office, receives a generally favorable report.

The political tide in Bulgaria turned on November 10, 1989, when Communist party dinosaur and head of state Todor Zhivkov was deposed by younger party cadres. On the occasion of the first free elections in 1990, the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), as the Communist Party had restyled itself, won the most seats. Only one year later, however, the anti-Communist umbrella movement, the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) under Philip Dimitrov, came to power. So it was that Bulgaria got her first non-Communist government since 1946. The parliamentary election of 1994, however, saw the BSP regain control. The years 1996 and 1997 witnessed a deep economic and political crisis. In the wake of mass protests, new elections were called for 1997 in which the United Democratic Forces, under the control of the UDF, won an absolute majority. The UDF under Premier *Ivan Kostov* implemented the long overdue process of economic and political restructuring.

In spring 2001 the exiled former monarch *Simeon II. of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha* (civil name: *Simeon Sakskoburggotski*) returned to the country which he had left in 1946 as a nine-year-old, getting actively involved in politics and winning almost 43 percent of the vote with his National Movement Simeon II (NMSII) in the parliamentary election of June 17. In so doing he missed out on an absolute majority by only one seat. The UDF won 18 percent, the BSP 17 percent and the DPS 7 percent. Bulgaria was subsequently run by a coalition of the NMSII and the ethnic Turkish DPS, which the BSP also joined on an informal basis.

The parliamentary election of June 25, 2005, however, brought about the clear defeat of the ruling NMSII, which only managed to garner 19.8 percent of the vote. The post-Communist BSP emerged victorious with 31 percent. The UDF civic coalition, with the participation of the UDF, recorded 7.7 percent of the vote, the civic coalition under the leadership of the DSB 6.5 percent, the liberal Bulgarian People's Union (BNU) 5.2 percent, the ultranationalist Ataka coalition, which later became a party, 8.2 percent and the ethnic

Turkish DPS 12.8 percent. The very broad-based governing coalition which emerged consisted of the BSP, the royalist NMSII movement and the DPS. The chairman of the Socialist Party, Sergei Stanishev, who was only 39 at the time, was appointed prime minister.

The central political event of 2009 in Bulgaria was the parliamentary election of July 5, from which the GERB party, led by former mayor of Sofia, Boyko Borisov, emerged victorious with 39.71 percent of the vote. The party thus laid claim to 116 seats in the National Assembly. At the same time the party fell short of an absolute majority. Among the biggest losers were the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) under Sergei Stanishev, with 17.72 percent and 40 seats, and the NMSII movement of the former monarch, *Simeon Saksoburggotski*, which, with a mere 3.02 percent of the vote, failed to clear the 4 percent hurdle. The only party in the ruling coalition to actually improve on its 2005 results was the movement representing the ethnic Turks, the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS), led by *Ahmed Dogan*, which won 14.46 percent of the vote and 38 seats. This was the best result in the history of the DPS, enabling it to draw level with the Socialists. The nationalist Ataka, led by *Volen Siderov* gained 9.36 percent of the vote and 21 seats. The civic Blue Coalition, which consisted of the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) under the chairmanship of *Martin Dimitrov* and the Democrats for a Strong Bulgaria (DSB), chaired by *Ivan Kostov*, along with some smaller parties, won 6.76 percent and 15 seats. One small party which did manage to clear the four percent hurdle was the Order, Law and Justice party (RZS), led by *Yane Yanev*, with 4.13 percent and 10 seats. The end result was that six parties and coalitions are represented in the Bulgarian Parliament.

The Transparency International Bulgaria organization reported numerous irregularities in the conduct of the election. Explicitly highlighted were the organized buying of votes and the exertion of political pressure on voters to cast their ballots for particular configurations. Transparency International estimates that about 14.5 percent of the total vote was not freely cast. It is likewise claimed that the expatriate vote was also subject to massive manipulation. Recriminations over breaches of the rules have subsequently led to the resignations of the ambassadors to the US and Turkey.

Before the country went to the polls, observers assumed that forming a government would be a long drawn out and complicated process. In reality *Borisov* managed to put a cabinet together extraordinarily quickly. The Bulgarian Parliament elected him and his proposed council of ministers (government) as early as July 27 by a sweeping majority of 162 votes, with only 77 voting against. Seeing as GERB was the largest group in the Parliament but was still short of an absolute majority, and *Borisov* had rejected the idea of a coalition government, a minority cabinet was formed which depended on the support of the radical Ataka party, the civic Blue Coalition and the Order,

Law and Justice party (RZS). The Socialist Party (BSP) and the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS) are both in opposition. The new cabinet includes a number of young experts, some of whom come from renowned international institutions. These include the finance minister and the deputy premier *Simeon Dyankov* (39), who was brought in from the World Bank in Washington. The GERB chairman *Zvetan Zvetanov* (44) was appointed minister of the interior and second deputy premier.

Under the two previous governments Bulgaria had been blighted by the establishment of a non-transparent style of politics with significant blurring of the boundaries between jurisdictions and areas of responsibility. In addition, in spite of membership of both the EU and NATO, an observable reorientation of Bulgarian foreign policy toward Russia had taken place. After 100 days of Borisov government, however, the first impression is of an emerging shift in political style. Unmistakable efforts on the part of prime minister Boyko Borisov to establish a new and transparent kind of politics with clear lines of political responsibility stand in sharp contrast to the period 2001-2009. Foreign policy is also showing signs of a paradigm shift with a stronger tendency to lean toward the EU.

Opinion polls show that the Borisov government enjoys high levels of approval. This has been confirmed by subsequent municipal elections in the capital Sofia and other cities. In Sofia, the candidate put forward by the ruling GERB party with the support of Ataka and the Blue Coalition was able to see off her Socialist challenger by a large majority in the first round. Another positive indication is that the government has managed in a very short space of time — and in spite of the ravages of the world financial crisis, which has increasingly been making itself felt in Bulgaria — to draft a domestic budget for 2010. This is an important precondition for the maintenance of macro-economic stability and is also of relevance as a preparatory move for the planned introduction of the euro.

Political scientist Yevgeny Daynov is of the opinion that the new politics of the Borisov government, when taken together with that of the Kostov cabinet (1997-2001), adds up to the most energetic government since the fall of Communism in 1989. It is still the case, however, that the Borisov government has so far failed decisively to tackle the problem of the shadow economy run by Mafia groups. The cabinet is also yet to develop a clear policy on the future development of the large Russian projects in Bulgaria (the Belene nuclear power station, and the South Stream and Burgas-Alexandroupolis pipelines) which were approved by the previous government. However, after its first 100 days the Borisov government can be given a cautiously optimistic report. That having been said, while the government has demonstrated both the readiness and the necessary drive to solve the problems lying in

wait, there is as yet no real evidence on the ground of any political implementation of changes to the current situation.

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