



## BULGARIA ELECTION UPDATE

### Final Issue

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Parliamentary Elections in Bulgaria

Bulgarian citizens went to the polls today to vote in the first regularly scheduled parliamentary elections since 1989. Voters are selecting 240 National Assembly deputies from among 54 parties or coalitions that have submitted regional lists of candidates. Turnout appears to have been solid. The electorate must vote for an entire party list as one; there is no mechanism to express preference for individual candidates. Four to five parties or coalitions are expected to pass the four percent threshold, including: the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF); the Coalition for Bulgaria, led by the Bulgarian Socialist Party; the National Movement Simeon II (NMS); and the mainly ethnic Turkish Movement for Rights and Freedom (MRF). A small conservative party, Gergovden-VMRO, might also enter parliament.

In this final issue NDI's resident representatives describe the composition of central election commission and report on their visits to several polling places in the capital, Sofia, and outside the city, as well as to the National Palace of Culture (NDK), which houses party election-night offices and an international press center, where they spoke to several party leaders.

#### COMPOSITION OF CENTRAL ELECTION COMMISSION

The Central Election Commission (CEC) had ruled that only the parties represented in the outgoing Parliament could appoint members of the polling station committees, which supervise voting at local and regional level. This meant that the National Movement Simeon II, which is new and therefore currently without parliamentary representation, would not sit on polling station committees, making recruitment of poll observers a top priority for the Movement in the remaining days before the election. The Movement had expressed concern

over voter confusion and a possible undercount of their supporters resulting from another party carrying Simeon's name and a change in the Movement's ballot title following a Central Election Commission decision. In districts with fewer than 300 registered voters, polling station committees consisted of 7 members (UDF – 3, MRF – 2, BSP – 1, BEL (Bulgarian Euroleft) or BBB (Bulgarian Business Bloc) – 1) while in districts with more than 300 registered voter polling station committees consisted of 9 members (UDF – 4, MRF – 2, BSP – 2, BEL or BBB – 1).

#### NDI VISITS POLLING STATIONS



\*Sample party ballots displayed inside every polling station.

NDI resident representatives and local staff visited six polling stations in Sofia's 25<sup>th</sup> district. Two polling stations were located in predominantly Roma communities. Voting proceeded smoothly; only two problems were observed. In one station a MRF pollwatcher was wearing an identification card featuring his party affiliation. The second issue was the disappearance of about 10 NMS ballots from a voting booth. Since one envelope is given to each voter in which to place one party ballot, the potential for fraud in this instance is minimal. If an envelope contains ballots for more than one party all the ballots are invalidated. If an

envelope contains multiple ballots of one party alone, only one ballot is counted.

NDI visited three polling stations northwest of Sofia. The first stop was a polling station in Kostinbrod with a total of 750 registered voters. Within the larger Kostinbrod municipality there are 12 polling stations throughout the town and 14 stations located in the surrounding villages. As of 4 p.m. this particular polling station had recorded 397 voters, and they expected final turnout numbers to be more than 50 percent by the end of the day. Monitoring the polling station were representatives of the NMS and the left-of-center Coalition for Bulgaria.

The second polling station visited was in Dragovishtitsa, a small village northeast of Kostinbrod. The polling place had a total of 842 registered voters and, by 5 p.m. 490 voters had cast their ballots. The polling-station workers reported some minor problems with a few residents who had changed their addresses, but all other elements seemed to be running smoothly. No party monitors were present at the time—as this station was visited earlier by some party observers rotating throughout the area.

The third polling place visited was located within a Roma community near central Sofia. The station was located in a school building. The line to vote was long and the building crowded with people waiting to vote and those having already voted. Turnout appeared quite high. People seemed excited to be a part of the voting process.

## **NDI TALKS WITH PARTIES' OFFICIALS**

### **Gergovden-VMRO Coalition**

At 9:45 p.m., the Gergovden-VMRO (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization) coalition was hovering right at the 4% threshold for representation in the new Parliament, and appeared to hold the key to the nature of Bulgaria's next government structure. Under Bulgaria's proportional representation formula, if the Gergovden-VMRO coalition passes the 4% threshold, it would appear that the NMS and the MRF together could not achieve a governing majority. On the other hand, if Gergovden-VMRO falls short of entering Parliament, the seats would be allocated in such a way that the NMS and the MRF would gain a majority.

Peter Kurumbashev, Gergovden Secretary-General and No. 1 candidate on the party list in Varna, told NDI that if his coalition is elected to the Parliament, it would have to see whether an agreement is possible to form a government together with the NMS and the MRF. "We don't know these people in the Tsar's coalition," Kurumbashev said. "We also can make a contribution in the opposition."

## **Movement for Rights and Freedoms**

Ahmed Emin, MRF campaign manager, told NDI that his party's big victory was a credit to its multiethnic composition. Emin said his party has good relations with the NMS and expects to be part of the next governing coalition. The formula for joining a government coalition was clear to his party, according to Emin, and would soon be revealed by party leader Ahmed Dogan.

Ruman Danov of the MRF coalition partner Liberal Union and No.1 MRF candidate in a Sofia district, said that the coalition had achieved a breakthrough in Sofia, where preliminary figures show it with 2-3% of the vote. The Liberal Union is the party of former Bulgarian President Zhelu Zhelev. The third party in the MRF election coalition is the European Roma Union.

## **PRELIMINARY ELECTION RESULTS**

As of 11:00 p.m. Alpha Research reported that the NMS garnered 41% of the vote, the UDF 20 %, Coalition for Bulgaria 18 %, the MRF 8%, and Gergovden-VMRO coalition 4.0 %.



\* Tsar Simeon at the press conference after preliminary results announced NMS victory.

In Central and Eastern Europe NDI conducts democratization programs in Albania, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia. For information on NDI's Bulgaria programs, please contact Alicia Phillips in Washington, D.C. at 202-328-3136 or NDI in Sofia (Rick Asplund 359-2-989-7238 or Ann Liston at 359-2-980-7753).