

With Plamen Oresharski's government on the verge of resigning, it remains to be seen whether Bulgaria can finally emerge from its political crisis

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Bulgaria has endured political instability since 2013, following a series of protests and the resignation of the country's government under Boyko Borisov. As [Ekaterina Rashkova](#) writes, the new government led by Plamen Oresharski, which emerged from elections in May 2013, has come under intense pressure in recent months and is widely expected to resign. She argues that with elections expected to be held later this year, Bulgaria is once again at a crossroads in terms of its future direction.



Bulgaria experienced mass protests in 2013, with the country's former Prime Minister Boyko Borisov resigning in February of that year, and early parliamentary [elections](#) following in May. Despite the hopes of many that this would bring a better political future and ultimately a more just legal system and a higher standard of living for the average person, the factors motivating the original protests – the oligarchic and corrupt behaviour which has permeated the political apparatus – have only become worse.

In the May 2013 election, surprisingly only four political parties passed the electoral threshold and made it to parliament: Borisov's party, [GERB](#); the [Bulgarian Socialist Party](#) (BSP), the main left-wing political party in Bulgaria (which is also a direct successor of the former communist party); [Movement for Rights and Freedoms](#) (DPS), the Turkish minority party; and [Attack](#), the relatively new nationalist party. Despite winning the election with just over 30.5 per cent of the popular vote, GERB did not form a government due to the fact that ideologically, it could not have partnered with any of the other three parties in the legislature.

The 4 per cent electoral threshold left all other right-oriented parties, whose support taken together accounted for almost 7.6 per cent, out of the parliament. These parties included [Democrats for a Strong Bulgaria](#), the party of former PM Ivan Kostov; [Bulgaria for Citizens Movement](#), a newly founded party by former EU commissioner Meglena Kuneva; and the [Union of Democratic Forces](#), the remaining part of the original 1989 opposition movement. Furthermore, an even more striking phenomenon was that in addition to the [low voter turnout](#), more than a quarter of the popular vote was cast for parties which did not make the legislative barrier.

As a result, the President handed the cabinet formation mandate to the second largest legislative group – the BSP. The Socialist Party formed a governing coalition with the DPS; however, having just 120 seats in the 240-seat parliament, its existence and functionality were left dependent on at least one vote from the nationalist Attack. Consequently, the parliamentary party with the lowest percentage of the popular vote (Attack officially received 7.3 per cent) suddenly became the strongest veto player in Bulgarian Prime Minister Plamen Oresharski's new cabinet.

Sarcastically referred to as the second triple coalition (after the three-party coalition of the 2005 -2009 Stanishev-led cabinet), the Oresharski government made a [180 degree turn](#) in the politics of the country, changing not only domestic and foreign policies, but also the international image of Bulgaria, which was built with years of effort of the right and centre-right led governments of Kostov and Borisov in particular.

In only its first week of operation, the Oresharski cabinet reversed the decentralisation of prosecuting power 'returning' the General Directorate for Combating Organized Crime (GDBOB) to the National Security Agency (abbreviated as ДАНС or DANS in Bulgarian), changed the rules of appointment of the head of DANS (previously this was done by the President of the Republic after a recommendation by parliament; the new cabinet changed the appointment procedure to be executed by parliament alone), announced the restarting of the Nuclear Power Plan

Belene (a project where Russia has vested interests and the execution of which was stopped by the Borisov cabinet), and changed the parliamentary rules (new guidelines allow break-away MPs to form new parliamentary groups and lower the minimum number of present MPs required for the work of parliamentary committees).

In this first critical one week, the Oresharski cabinet built its nest, where it could safely start 'hatching'. Many things changed after that, but perhaps the two most notable were the quick and effortless appointment of Deyan Peevski as head of the National Security Agency, and the strong push forward on beginning the construction of an international gas pipeline, South Stream, which is primarily financed by Russia, and as previous governments have argued is not only financially unsound for Bulgaria, but feeds into and worsens one of the country's major problems, namely its full energy dependence on Moscow.



Plamen Oresharski, Credit: PES Communications (CC-BY-SA-NC-ND-3.0)

The current crisis

The two events frame the ongoing political crisis in Bulgaria. The unprecedented appointment of Peevski, a media magnate member of the Turkish minority party DPS who has been investigated in the past over corruption allegations, started a massive wave of social protests (organised primarily on social media under the hashtag #ДАНСwithme), which was the first signal that the Oresharski government is doomed and that it is only a matter of time until it falls. The steps made to move forward in the process of building South Stream, an event which not only raised the eyebrows of the international community in light of the recent events taking place in Ukraine, but also led to the beginning of a EU-led investigation in the legality of the procedure, marked the 'beginning of the end' of the Oresharski government. Nevertheless, neither one of the events managed to bring the government down.

Amidst this chaos, the European elections, which were held last month, produced a strong defeat for the ruling cabinet, with the BSP receiving the lowest electoral support in its history, and Attack not being able to send a representative to the European Parliament. These results, coupled with intra-party conflict over the party leadership and direction, brought rumors about resignation and early elections. Coincidentally or not, the PM announced that the building of South Stream would be **suspended** until an agreement with the EU can be reached, a decision which other party members denied.

A media war between two of the largest investors started to take place, with one of the figures involved being Deyan Peevski, the other one an owner of a major bank which is said to service most state-related businesses (the bank is currently at risk of bankruptcy and its leadership has been taken by the National Bank). The leader of the BSP, Sergey Stanishev, publicly announced that the cabinet needed to resign within a week and that new parliamentary elections should be held in the summer. Yet, thus far, we have not seen a resignation, and a date for early elections has yet to be agreed upon.

Bulgaria is once again at the crossroads of change. However, the recent political events suggest that it is behind the scenes games translated into rivalries that currently prompt the change, and not the democratically voiced will of the people. In that case, Bulgarians have a lot more to worry about than who and what will come next: they have to find a way to legitimate power and institutional vehicles through which power can be taken away from those that have lost popular support.

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Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of EUROPP – European Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics.

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