
BULGARIA SET FOR SNAP ELECTION AS PRESIDENT APPOINTS INTERIM PM

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Bulgarias new president yesterday (24 January) called an early national election for 26 March and appointed a former parliamentary speaker as caretaker prime minister until then.

Ognyan Gerdzhikov, 70, currently a professor of law and head of an arbitration court, served as speaker of parliament in a centrist government from 2001 to 2005 and is now the Eastern European countrys interim prime minister.

Kiril Ananiev, 61, currently a deputy finance minister in charge of budgets, will take over as finance minister, two sources familiar with the matter told Reuters. Ananiev is seen as a safe pair of hands, having served as deputy finance minister in five different governments.

The appointments show that President Rumen Radev, who took office this month after winning an election with the backing of the opposition Socialists, is seeking continuity and balance, analysts said.

Radev had to call an early election after Bulgarias centre-right government resigned late last year following the defeat of its candidate in the presidential election. Radev will dissolve the parliament at the end of the week.

The head of state sets 26 March as the date for the general election. With another decree, the president appoints Ognyan Gerdzhikov as interim prime minister, the presidents office said in a statement.

Russia-friendly Radev is also expected to appoint diplomat Radi Naidenov, currently Bulgarias ambassador to Germany, as interim foreign minister as he seeks to reaffirm Sofias commitment to its allies in the European Union and NATO.

Last week, Radev said that Donald Trump offers hope for an improvement in relations between Russia and the West. He also called for EU sanctions on Russia to be lifted and said that Crimea, annexed by Moscow in 2014, is de facto Russian, during his election campaign.

In the pursuit of balance

The main task of Gerdzhikovs interim government will be to ensure that the country holds a fair election and maintains fiscal stability to protect the Bulgarian currencys peg against the euro.

Radev won his post with the support of the Socialists, but the interim government does not look like a Socialist one, said Parvan Simeonov, an analyst at Sofia-based Gallup International.

We see a centrist line and with the finance minister □ a continuity of policies. Radev wants balance and this is what the interim government shows, he said.

The previous centre-right government of Boiko Borisov secured economic growth and cut unemployment to an eight-year low while cutting the fiscal deficit, but its failure to tackle endemic graft in the EUs poorest country has frustrated voters.

Political analysts say the parliamentary election, Bulgarias third since 2013, is again unlikely to produce a strong majority government able to implement the judicial, economic and other reforms the country needs.

Borisovs GERB party has a narrow lead over its main Socialist rival, latest opinion polls show.

None of the parties is expected to win an outright majority, which will result in a fragmented parliament and another fragile coalition government, Teneo Intelligence analyst Andrius Tursa said in a note.

The search for a new EU Commissioner to fill the empty chair left by Kristalina Georgieva, who resigned last year to take up a new position at the World Bank, also continues.

By EurActiv.com with AFP and Reuters

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