

How to cite this paper:

Kaleynska, T. (2023). The Political Crisis in Bulgaria /2021-2023/: Internal and External Consequences. *Perspective Politice*. Special Issue. 101-111[10].

<https://doi.org/10.25019/perspol/23.16.0.10>

Received: April 2023

Accepted: May 2023

Published: June 2023

Copyright: © 2023 by the authors. Submitted for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license.

Article

The Political Crisis in Bulgaria /2021–2023/: Internal and External Consequences

Abstract: *The article examines the political crisis of Bulgarian political society (2021-2023), through the categories of trust and mistrust in politics and their implementation in real politics. Within 24 months, five early parliamentary elections in Bulgaria were held. Analysis is provided on internal (complete mistrust among political actors, non-forming a Cabinet, change of the agenda of the society by the political elite, steps to a new role of Caretaker government and the President, citizens' electoral participation) and external (the political respond towards the war Ukraine-Russia, the implementation of Bulgaria's Recovery and resilience plan, the postponement of Bulgaria's accession to Schengen and the country's preparations for joining the euro area) consequences.*

Keywords: *Bulgaria; early elections; internal and external consequences; political crisis*

1. Introduction

The issue of trust in politics is key when analysing political processes. Trust engages civil society, builds a meaningful culture of civic participation in decision-making and community management processes, builds behaviours of inclusion and solidarity. Political trust is aimed at

trust in the functioning of democracy and its institutions, in the process of effective decision-making and ensuring the sustainability of democratic development and institutions. Political trust is among the main characteristics of the political system, it determines the levels of political participation, defines the specifics of civil participation, and is an indi-

cator of the democratic development of society. In the process of its construction in the conditions of democracy, citizens have a defining leading political role in society by delegating their power and will to various political entities and thus form the legitimacy and sustainability of the political system. Therefore, trust is directly related to the essence, legitimacy, functioning, development of a democratic society.

Political trust is directly related to policy-making by political entities and institutions, then when citizens need to analyse the level of ef-

Teodora KALEYNSKA

St. Cyril and St. Methodius University,
Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria;
kaleynska@abv.bg

efficiency and fairness within the political system, the degree of their satisfaction with the development of the community, traditionally between polling periods to express of this trust (Gray and Caul, 2000: 1097), i.e. holding elections.

Declining trust is an essential part of contemporary political processes and may be a reflection of economic processes with poor economic outcomes that shape citizens' perceptions that the government they have elected is incapable of solving the fiscal and financial challenges that have arisen (Newton and Norris, 2000: 64); political scandals and corruption. As corruption is a particularly painful indicator that is monitored by citizens and forms trust or distrust towards the respective government in particular and towards the system as a whole.

Trust in the system, citizens' trust in decision-making processes and methods, increase the degree of civic engagement, create community values and ideals, mobilization of development of institutions and the state, lead to active political participation in all its forms.

2. Dissection of the crisis – from street protests to the fifth early parliamentary elections

In April 2023 Bulgaria held its fifth early parliamentary elections in the last two years (April 2021-April 2023). The political crisis that began in the summer of 2020 as civil street protests related to the assertion of law, justice, the rule of law, went through a series of dynamic manifestations, but with the leading civil priority and demand for the establishment of a rule of law. As a result of the political crisis, the Bulgarian society was divided into two value groups, which did not contribute to the establishment of a stable government, despite the holding of a series of elections. Because at the basis of stability it is possible to stand only the significant compromise, which the political parties do not demonstrate to rule.

The dynamics of the deepening division of the Bulgarian society starts from the protests of the Bulgarian citizens from the summer of 2020, the main characteristic of which was the disappointment and public dissatisfaction with the political elite. Mainly young people, without political bias and representation, are actively opposed to the widespread corruption and lawlessness in the country's governance, with specific requests for the resignation of Borisov's cabinet, the chief prosecutor, for the holding of early elections, for the modernization of the administrative bureaucracy and the introduction of an electronic government, to remove the mutts from the entire life of the country, to seek effective judicial responsibility from those responsible for the situation in the country, for freedom of speech. A series of sociological studies carried out from the period show the full support of the citizens for the protests /48%, and 25% support them with some reservations. Almost 20% do not approve of them, and 7% are those who cannot decide what position to take, 45.6% of citizens disapprove of the radicalization of protests and acts of civil disobedience, and 38.4% approve of such behavior. The opinion of those who conducted the research is that Bulgaria is heading towards political chaos (Tonchev, 2020). The country is in a tense and polarized atmosphere, which is why holding parliamentary elections is an important test for democracy.

After holding parliamentary elections on April 4, 2021, Bulgaria fell into the spiral of political crisis, carrying out five extraordinary votes that did not lead to a sustainable result and a regular cabinet. Elections fail to produce a coalition government, there is no agreement on policies, the country is run by a series of caretaker governments that are appointed by the President. The period marks the National Assembly, which has the shortest life in the history of

Bulgarian parliamentary practice – 45 National Assembly lasted only 26 days. The period also marks the shortest reign of the Council of Ministers in Bulgaria's recent history – the government of Kiril Petkov, which exercised its power for only 158 days.

3. The spiral of elections

Before *4 April 2021*, two major political parties: the EPP-affiliated Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB) and Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) dominated the political scene in Bulgaria, switching their lead in government for the past 15 years. The April 2021 elections made significant changes to the political landscape, with the emerging of new political parties – There Is Such A People (ITN), and two new coalitions, Democratic Bulgaria (DB) and Rise Up! Thugs Out! (ISMV), entering the parliament. Six parties and coalitions passed the 4% threshold and entered the 240-seat parliament: GERB – 75 seats (25.8%); ITN – 51 seats (17.4%); BSP – 43 seats (14.79%); Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF) – 30 seats (10.36%); DB – 27 seats (9.31%); ISMV – 14 seats (4.65%).

The parliament failed to form a government and on 12 May 2021 the President of Bulgaria dissolved the National Assembly and called early parliamentary elections to be held on 11 July 2021.

The *11 July 2021* early parliamentary elections ended as result in the same six parties and coalitions passing the 4% threshold, but with the populist ITN polling narrowly ahead of GERB: ITN – 65 seats (24.08%); GERB – 63 seats (23.51%); BSP – 36 seats (13.39%); DB – 34 seats (12.64%); MRF – 29 seats (10.71%); Coalition Rise Up! Thugs out!" (ISMV) – 13 seats (5.01%). The voters' turnout was of 42.19%. Hopes for the formation of a coalition and government around the opposition against GERB were quickly collapsing, as ITN declared that it would not take part in any coalition and would only rule by itself, with a "government of experts" consisting only of ITN party members. For the second time, the parliament failed to form a new government. On 14 September the parliament was dissolved again, and the next round of early parliamentary elections called on 14 November 2021, the date of the already scheduled regular presidential election.

The *14 November 2021* early elections resulted in seven parties and coalitions passing the threshold, with a newcomer – We Continue the Change (PP) – achieving 25.67% of the vote (67 seats). PP was followed by GERB – 59 seats (22.74%), MRF – 34 seats (13%); BSP – 26 seats (10.21%); ITN – 25 seats (9.52%); DB – 16 seats (6.37%) and Vuzeajdane (Revival) – 13 seats (4.86%). The turnout declined to 40.23%.

To some extent these third elections managed to break the political deadlock. Led by Kiril Petkov, former Minister of Economy in the caretaker government of Stefan Yanev (May-December 2021), the PP formed a coalition government with the coalition BSP for Bulgaria (BSPzB), ITN and DB. Kiril Petkov was elected Prime Minister on 13 December 2021 and the government started its work. The priorities declared were to curb corruption but without an agreed coalition programme. Very soon, on the political issue of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, the coalition resorted to mutual accusations of undermining governmental decisions. February 2022 was decisive for the faith of the government. The Prime Minister Petkov faced the refusal from BSP to send extra military aid to Ukraine, the Minister of Defence Stefan Yanev refused to use the word "war" in reference to the Russia aggression to Ukraine and was resigned. On 8 June, the coalition partner ITN, which had called for energy cooperation with Rus-

sia even after Gazprom cut off supplies to Bulgaria, withdrew from the coalition, citing disagreements with the state budget, rising debt and slow progress in fighting corruption.

On 22 June 2022, the government faced a vote of no confidence, which it lost. Kiril Petkov formally resigned from his position as prime minister on 27 June. President Rumen Radev subsequently called for the next early elections to be held on 2 October and appointed a caretaker government with the main task to organise the elections and to govern the country until a new administration was formed.

The war in Ukraine and its severe impact on energy, economy, employment and politics, and the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, deepened these cleavages. It divided the already divided nation deeper due to the centuries loyalty and affinities between EU/NATO and Russia. This altered political, economic and social environment had a visible impact on the parties' campaigning. This also went in parallel with the deep disappointment of the voters with the recently elected political actors with the perception of a grave deficit of values, ideas and strategies for the future of the country and their failure to deliver their promises. The turnout of the third elections remained at 39,42%

The 2 October 2022 fourth early parliamentary elections brought back GERB as the biggest party in Parliament. The winner of the November 2021 early elections, the liberal PP lost 14 seats. The coalition partners BSP for Bulgaria and ITN paid the price of having participated in the coalition government. BSP's support has withered gradually with every new electoral cycle. The populist ITN, which triggered the collapse of the government in June 2022, failed even to cross the electoral threshold to the parliament. The big winner was again the Revival (far-right pro-Kremlin) doubling its result and taking the fourth place. The predominantly Turkish MRF saw a relatively high degree of mobilisation of their voters. A newly emerged party entered the parliament – of the former PM Yanev's Bulgarian Rise thus following the tradition of small political subject to enter the parliamentary politics for a short period of time. The turnout of the third elections remained at 39,41%

In a long roulette of endless and dead-end negotiations, with number of old and newly emerged "red dividing lines", the fragmented parliament failed to form a government. So the president dissolved parliament on 3 February 2023 and called the fifth early parliamentary election in a row.

The 2 April 2023 early parliamentary elections were the fifth time when the political elite asked the citizens to vote. The election resulted in six parties and coalitions passing the threshold. GERB – achieving 26.49% (69 seats), coalition We Continue the Change (PP) – DB – achieving 24,57% of the vote (64 seats). Nationalistic PP Revival tripled its result to 14,16% (37 seats) becoming the third parliamentary political actor, MRF – 36 seats (13,72%); BSP – 23 seats (8,93%); ITN – 11 seats (4.11%). The turnout of the fifth elections remained at 40,63%

Table 1 Early parliamentary elections results

Party	April 2021	July 2021	Nov 2021	Oct 2022	April 2023
GERB – UDF	75	63	59	67	69
PP	-	-	67	53	64 (coalition PP-DB)
Democratic Bulgaria	27	34	16	20	-
MFR	30	29	34	36	36
Revival	-	-	13	27	37
BSP for Bulgaria	43	36	26	25	23
Bulgarian Rise	-	-	-	12	-
ITN	51	65	25	-	11

Source: <https://results.cik.bg/>.

For 18 of the 24 months of elections, Bulgaria has been governed by caretaker governments.

4. Main causes of political instability

The political landscape, although diverse and colourful with the presence of numerous political parties, is dominated by two main parties – GERB and BSP, which have exercised power for the past 15 years alone or in coalition formats, traditionally with the shadow support of the DPS. The last Cabinet Borisov ruled with the support of the VMRO political party. Shortly before parliamentary elections on April 4, 2021, a number of new parties and coalitions are being created, some of them provoked by the civil protests. In the course of the spiral of the electoral carousel, a series of new political entities were created, which are actively involved in the expansion of the political mosaic – political party There is Such A People (June 2020), coalition Get Up. Get Out (February 2021), political party We Continue the Change /September 2021/, political party Bulgarian Rise /May 2022/, Left coalition /February 2023/ etc. The new political parties contribute to the expansion of political pluralism in Bulgaria, enriching the possible choices of Bulgarian citizens. At the same time, the irreplaceability of leaders and the inclusion of old people in new formations do not bring the necessary change and expectation for the development of the political scene.

Gradually, the protests are subsiding, the war between Ukraine and Russia has radically changed the political environment and deepened the crises in Bulgarian society. A survey of public opinion in a representative Alpha Research survey from early September 2022 presents a *strongly changed social and political environment* in Bulgaria:

- There is a clear preponderance of people's *economic and financial concerns* over the prevailing *goal of changing the governance model* a year ago;

The top 3 most important problems for people, mentioned by eight out of ten Bulgarians (in a survey conducted in the period 27 August – 2 September 2022 by Alpha Research, published on the Agency's website and implemented with own funds. The survey was con-

ducted among 1,117 adults from across the country), are: inflation (89%), energy prices in winter 2022 (86%), healthcare (83%) (Alpha Research, 27.08-2.09.2022).

- *Distrust* of party leaders now extends to the entire political class, not just the old politicians;

In crisis situations, disillusionment with some politicians is accompanied by a transfer of trust and hope to a new generation, or new faces of politicians, which characterizes the course of the political process in 2021. The whole of 2022 is characterised by a serious erosion of trust in all key party leaders and if any competition between them can be analysed, it is “who is least hated, not who is most liked”.

The crisis, the erosion of trust in key political figures is a risk factor for the vote. Solving severe crises requires leadership and vision. If such faces are not there, it is a serious problem for the entire political system.

The general distrust of the political class covers all political figures, with a sharp decline in trust in their personal images – Borisov / 21% positive vs. 55% negative /, Petkov / 18% positive vs. 56% negative /, Ninova / 15.9% positive vs. 56% negative /, Kostadinov / 13% positive vs. 55% negative /, Slavi Trifonov / 11% positive vs. 61% negative.

- *Distrust in institutions and in parliament* as an institution of democracy, partly due to its ineffective functioning.

In the course of the work of the 45th, 46th, 47th and 48th National Assembly, none of the three functions that the Parliament has under the Constitution were fulfilled with substance. The 45th National Assembly did not start its legislative activity at all, the 47th National Assembly started its legislative activity by changing the Electoral Code in preparation for new elections, totally changing the agenda of the society and the expectations towards it.

Neither National Assembly elected a government, nor passed a state budget for 2023, nor elected and filled missing members in various bodies, including international institutions. The short days of existence of the last four National Assemblies were filled with conducting parliamentary scrutiny and summoning ministers to present answers to questions active before their inauguration or to present the abuses of the previous government(s). Thus the national assemblies became the arena in which political parties developed their endless confrontations; exchange of mutual accusations and excuses on each topic and policy.

- Disillusionment is displacing last year’s hopes and, together with the *lack of clear governing alternatives*, is making the electorate very hesitant about whether and for whom to vote;
- As a result, many of the parties are losing even recently loyal voters, and the vote for half of the political parties with a chance of being represented in the 49th National Assembly remains within a narrow range in which they could swap positions.
- The war between Russia and Ukraine and corruption were mentioned by about two-thirds of respondents. Next are environmental problems related to the state of dams, reservoirs, etc., as well as illegal immigration, which again became the focus of public attention after the tragic incidents and concern two-thirds of the adult Bulgarians polled. The ranking of the ten most significant problems is complemented by the state of the roads, especially on the threshold of the approaching winter season, and education.

For decades, the political elites in Bulgaria have been divided over their affinities to the European Union/NATO and Russia. The war in Ukraine and its severe impact on energy, economy and politics, the Covid-19 pandemic, deepened these cleavages. After the gap between the political elites and the citizens of 2020, in 2023 a *liberal and conservative groups* are clearly

formed. Clear electoral profiles can be identified. E.g. in the case of the PP and DB the profile is more progressive, globalist, urban, young, typically liberal of Western European type. However, the division clearly continues as on the other hand a more conservative camp has formed around GERB, which advocates ideas that are more national and traditional. Researchers accept this as a normalisation after the specific divisions imposed for a long time during the Bulgarian transition. Political realities also gave birth to new political jargon instead of the classical definitions of liberal-conservative, “status quo – change”, reformist-conservative as “paper coalition” vs. “machine voting” e.g. in the April 2023 elections. In a research Markovska (2021: 158) points out that “sharing common cultural perceptions and a common emotional space are basic conditions necessary for the formation of a sense of empathy and solidarity in a society. Without them, it is difficult to create a political community, “build” a civil society or create a public space.” She argues that the public space under the Covid 19 pandemic has completely changed the “personal responsibility and its blurring in collective irresponsibility”.

A significant reason for the political crisis is the fact that *political parties do not want and do not dare to take over the governance*, to take responsibility for the decision-making process in times of crisis. The period was marked by a series of crises – the pandemic and overcoming the effects of COBID-19 and its impact on all spheres of public life, the war in Ukraine, the complicated international environment, problems caused by Bulgaria’s geographical location, strong migration pressure. In this period important expected events were unsuccessful and postponed for the country – its accession to Schengen and the introduction of the euro. The political parties have failed to communicate the public agenda, they do not share programmes and strategies for finding a way out of the crisis, they do not even talk about a possible compromise for the sake of the country’s development. The political parties are in a state of constant confrontation. The confrontation of the summer of 2020 – between change and the status quo, is current and prevents the parties of the two camps from any cooperation with each other. E.g. the elections on 2 October gave birth to a kind of blocking majority in the parliament – GERB, MRF, and Revival, which between them cannot make a cabinet, but at the same time it is not possible without any of them; Revival for objective reasons is not acceptable to the other parties, and DB and PP, who inherited the energy for change, do not want to be with GERB and MRF. Since the war in Ukraine, a new division has emerged. It pitted Euro-Atlantic formations such as the PP, DB and GERB against those with a different position such as the BSP and Revival.

The political language is riddled with “red dividing lines”, the word “coalition” is not in anyone’s vocabulary, the messages are divergent and confusing, alienating citizens from participation rather than the other way around. This reluctance to exercise power has made President Radev a record holder in the awarding of mandates, as between April 2021 and April 2023 he exercised his constitutional duty and awarded mandates 12 times, appointed three caretaker governments and has ruled with caretaker governments for one year and eight months.

The political instability has also given birth to *new political subjects* and has led to an *increase in the radical and nationalist vote*. In the absence of strong electoral campaigns that lead to a strong motivation to vote, with the relatively low voter turnout these processes are natural. The political party Revival is the big winner from the political crisis in Bulgaria. From the 2017 parliamentary elections to April 2023, the party has increased its support from 1% ahead of 2017 to 14.15% in April 2023. After a roller-coaster of snap elections, the Renaissance Party is the third political force expected to receive a mandate to form a government,

and has initiated a national referendum against the introduction of the euro. The war in Ukraine, the indecisiveness of political party leaderships and the pursuit of unstable politics without a clear perspective will further strengthen the influence of the political party Revival, giving room for nationalist and radical ideas.

Political instability was also marked by *political corruption and lobbying*, so characteristic of the Borissov cabinet. Political parties continue to have vaguely regulated funding during the election period. Vanya Nusheva examines the process and offers recommendations based on international standards for political party and electoral campaign financing, as well as Bulgaria's experience in the period 1990-2019. Analysing "the impact of different categories of donors on the activities of political parties, and subsequently on the governance of the main representative institutions formed as a result of the elections", Kashukeva-Nusheva and Slavov present "this complex issue, with projections into all important spheres of political life" and draw recommendations consistent with international standards (2021: 42,205).

In the framework of the move to hold the fifth early parliamentary elections in April 2023, *the international community* has indicated that it is monitoring the democratic processes in Bulgaria, taking a series of steps. On February 10, 2023, the United States issued a new set of sanctions, under the so-called Magnitsky List. The sanctions targeted former finance minister in the Second and Third Borisov Government, Vladislav Goranov, former energy minister in the Stanishev Government, Rumen Ovcharov, the leader of Russophiles for the Revival of the Fatherland, Nikolay Malinov, as well as two former heads of the Kozloduy Nuclear Power Plant. The group were accused of corruption, financial mismanagement and increasing Russian influence. The announcement provoked a range of differing reactions from political parties and politicians in Bulgaria. From distancing and avoiding the topic /GERB/ through explaining that it was an intervention with a view to worsening Russia-Bulgaria relations /BSP/, to the meme of the leader of Bulgarian Rise Stefan Yanev, the view, calling it another "scandal" which undermined trust between political parties.

On the other hand, on 1 March 2023, the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO) published its 2022 report, which ranked Bulgaria second among the 22 countries in the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO) for the number of criminal investigations opened for crimes affecting the EU's financial interests – a total of 143 cases, of which 101 were opened last 2022, and €492m worth of investigations are ongoing. At the same time, Bulgaria has only one indictment with a conviction in these investigations. The European Public Prosecutor's Office has requested attachments for €6.5m and 25 cases have been brought to court. The highest number of cases is for fraud with EU money that was distributed without public procurement – 94 cases.

Of utmost importance for solving the political crisis will be the answer to the question of forming a functioning parliament and a regular government, which should effectively and relatively very quickly lead and implement the Bulgarian initiatives included in the *EU Recovery and Development Plan*, under which Bulgaria expects over 700 million euros. These are linked to the fulfilment of certain conditions in the form of the adoption of 22 legislative measures, some of which are dependent on having a functioning parliament, and the deadline for their adoption is the end of 2023. Another potential obstacle to funding under the plan is the creation of a mechanism to improve the accountability and criminal responsibility of the Attorney General. This measure is foreseen in the conditions for the third tranche and should come into force by the middle of next year 2024.

A series of internal factors also had impact on the fifth early elections. Immediately after taking office, the new parliament tackled the *Electoral Code* with amendments to return to paper ballots and other changes. On 4 November 2022, at the initiative of GERB, BSP and DPS, it voted on first reading, with 125 deputies “for” and 100 “against”, to return to the vote with paper ballot in parallel to machine voting.

The Public Council of the Central Election Commission (CEC) was closed. The members of the Commission itself were increased to 25 to be able to fit and cover proportionally the newly represented PPs in the parliament.

A new important for the political landscape coalition occurred on 11 February 2023. “We Continue the Change” and “Democratic Bulgaria” carried out semi-secretly the most important event in the right-wing political space in the last 15 years – the drafting of a coalition agreement for joint participation in the elections. They signed for participation in the elections as one centre-right coalition, with the goal to win the first place in the early parliamentary elections. Instead of posturing the unity, the negotiations were held behind the curtain. The goal of this unification is high, but the sympathizers are not convinced that the path is right.

At the same time BSP held its party congress and excluded 14 party functionaries from the top leadership who demanded Ninova’s resignation. Those expelled were followed by large and diverse groups from regional party organisations. A process of “swarming of the BSP” is underway.

This process coincided with the registration of a new coalition “The Left”, which unites left-oriented political movements and parties led by former influential persons and members of the BSP top leadership such as Maya Manolova /National Ombudsman/, Kostadin Paskalev and others.

During this not so long, but very intense process of development of the political crisis in Bulgaria, undoubtedly the attention was often focused on the work of President Rumen Radev. He is constitutionally obliged to appoint and lead a caretaker government in efforts to organise another early elections. Some political parties in Bulgaria have accused President Radev of meddling in political affairs, as well as internal party politics, which is in breach with his constitutional duties. On 7 February, BSP sent an official complaint to the international observer organizations alleging illegal meddling by the caretaker government and President in their internal politics, which it later withdrew. The PP-DB coalition has also accused president of meddling after President Radev called them the “parties of war” referring to their support of sending arms to Ukraine. ITN on the contrary believes that the president should have more powers compared to the current roles outlined in the constitution, advocating for a transit to a presidential republic and calling for a referendum on this.

5. Conclusions

The political crisis resulting in five early parliamentary elections between Apr 2021 and Apr 2023 demonstrates some tendencies in Bulgarian political life.

The level of trust towards political parties and leaders is constantly low and stays stable in the society and led to a comparative low turnout – around 40% in all the early elections.

The level of trust in political parties and leaders is relatively low, but it is stable in society, and this leads to a relatively low turnout – around 40% in all early elections. But this may be debatable given that the electoral voters’ lists in the fifth snap election in April 2023 were also full of persons who live abroad, have passes away – i.e. some 600,000 names are on the list

and sharply lower turnout. However, if the electoral voters' lists are cleared, turnout will exceed 50% of actual voters. This game with the numbers is important because it demonstrates the unwillingness of political institutions to be transparent and accurate, turn down the trust towards the democratic process.

For decades, since the start of the transition, the polarization of the Bulgarian society is high. It runs along different dividing lines, forming different cleavages. From the first years of the transition and the communist – anti-communist opposition, to the political crisis under discussion with the opposition between the parties of the status quo and of change, parties in favour of aid to Ukraine and arms supply and against, parties divided over the way of voting /paper ballot – machine/, parties with pro-NATO orientation and in support of Russia. And although the division brings many negatives for each society, it clearly outlines the trends in the development of a community and its political preferences. The Bulgarian society clearly demonstrates its humane international solidarity and choice with the people of Ukraine, clearly defines in the political agenda the need for a firm pro-European and pro-NATO orientation.

The polarization showed clearly that the period of firm coalitions, of political representations with a large majority are rather in history and the need for the Bulgarian political elite to upgrade its coalition culture. Most probably coalitions would be the country's future political stability and development. Having parties with equal preferences of their voters will require mastering the art of coalition government, building a new political agenda that meets the priorities of society and country development, guaranteed by floating majorities. This will require broad and constant positive communication, the search for mutually acceptable solutions by the political elite, mastering the power of compromise and dialogue. Any transgression and disregard of this trend will push the country into new early elections, meaningless in their nature given the fact that they would be predictable as a result. The degree of mastery of coalition culture and action will demonstrate the maturity of the elites.

“By casting their vote for the fifth time in two years, Bulgaria's citizens have, despite electoral fatigue, expressed their political will”, said Andrej Hunko, Head of the delegation from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe for the 2April 2023 election. “They now expect their elected representatives to find the necessary political compromises to form a government and address people's needs. This would be a first step towards re-establishing trust in political institutions and society, at all levels, which is essential in a democratic society.”

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

- Alpha Research (2022) Electoral Attitudes at the Campaign Start – October 2022 General Elections. Available at: <https://alpharesearch.bg/post/1000-elektoralni-naglasi-na-starta-na-predizborna-kampania-parlamentar-ni-izbori-oktomvri-2022.html>.
- Central Election Commission (2023) Election results. Available at: <https://results.cik.bg/>.
- Gray, M. and Caul. M. (2000) Declining Voter Turnout in Advanced Industrial Democracies: 1950 to 1997: The Effects of Declining Group Mobilization. *Comparative Political Studies*, 33, pp. 1091-1121.
- Kashukeva-Nusheva, V., and Slavov, K. (2021) *The Bulgarian Model of Political Financing and Conducting Elections: International Standards, Topical Issues and Possible Solutions*. Sofia: Foundation Friedrich Ebert Publisher.

- Markovska, A. (2021) Political and Cultural Reflections of Bulgarian Society in Times of Crisis Dimitrov, D., Palangurski, M. et al. (eds.). *Proceedings of 4th International Conference Southeast Europe: History, Culture, Politics, and Economy*. Bologna: Filodiritto Publisher, pp.157-163.
- Newton, K. and Norris, P. (2000) Confidence in Public Institutions: Faith, Culture, or Performance? In: S.J. Pharr and R.D. Putnam *Disaffected Democracies: What's troubling the Trilateral Democracies?* New Jersey: Princeton University Press, pp. 52-73.
- Tonchev, V. 2020. A study by "Sova Harris" commissioned by the "Trud" newspaper: Bulgaria is headed for political chaos (In Bulgarian). *Trud*. Available at: <https://trud.bg/%D0%B1%D1%8A%D0%BB%D0%B3%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%B8%D1%8F-%D0%B2%D1%8A%D1%80%D0%B2%D0%B8-%D0%BA%D1%8A%D0%BC-%D0%BF%D0%BE%D0%BB%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B8%D1%87%D0%B5%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B8-%D1%85%D0%B0%D0%BE%D1%81/>.