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Election underdog

 Fri, Jun 12 2009 10:00 CET | by [Petar Kostadinov](#) | 191 Views


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Meglena Kouneva, left, helped boost NMSP's result at the polls.

 Photo: [Krassimir Youkseseliev](#)

If one party had cause for celebration after the June 7 elections for Bulgarian members of European Parliament, it was the ruling coalition partner, the National Movement for Stability and Progress (NMSP). Right until the end of election day most polls said that the party, which in 2001 won a landslide victory in the Bulgarian Parliament elections and has been in power ever since, would be left without representation in the European Parliament and would be reduced to the status of a third rate political force.

Hours after the elections, however, it became clear that the NMSP had won not one but two seats in the European Parliament. Its leaders naturally interpreted this as the party's rebirth, a month ahead of elections for the Bulgarian Parliament.

Much of the party's success was attributed to the popularity of European Consumer Protection Commissioner Meglena Kouneva, who took a month's leave to head the party's election ticket. Kouneva's contribution to the NMSP's success was evident at a June 8 news conference, when party leader and former monarch and prime minister, Simeon Saxe-Coburg, expressed his deepest gratitude to her, unusual for one who normally shirks personal references. It was a well deserved "thank you" to Kouneva who, in turn, has always said that she owed her political career to Saxe-Coburg.

Indeed, Kouneva proved indispensable to the NMSP in the election campaign with her clear and esteemed reputation as one of Bulgaria's best faces in Europe.

Hence it was hardly surprising that the NMSP concentrated its entire campaign around her and won. The party's message was "vote for Kouneva", rather than "vote for the NMSP", which showed that majority candidates can win in Bulgaria despite many doubts expressed by political leaders. As the NMSP ticket leader, Kouneva won 28.5 per cent of all her party's votes. This makes her the only candidate, together with Nadezhda Mihailova from the right-wing Blue Coalition, to have passed the 15 per cent threshold for majority candidates. In other words, Kouneva would have probably won a seat in the European Parliament even if she had stood for elections alone.

But if her success was more or less predictable, the success of Antonia Purvanova, second on the NMSP ticket, surprised many analysts.

For those who have followed Purvanova's political career, however, it was not surprising. She has been campaigning hard for a seat in EP from the day when she lost it in the 2007 elections, after she was given an unfavourable third position on the party ticket. It was much more disappointing for her when she got most of the preferential vote and almost won the race against ticket leader Bilyana Raeva, but the 15 per cent threshold proved too high. In 2009 Purvanova got her rematch and won.

For NMSP opponents, however, Purvanova's win was a result of something more than luck or strong and positive campaigning, as Purvanova said on June 8. The most vociferous skeptics about the NMSP's success was the right-wing Blue Coalition. In the first few hours after the elections the coalition was celebrating its two seats in EP, only to find out the next day that it was 361 votes behind the NMSP and that Purvanova had stolen the seat. This left the Blue Coalition with one MEP.

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