



By: TA | AP Brief

Will Bulgaria get its first female president?



Bulgarians voted on Sunday in a presidential runoff marked by regional security threats and economic worries at home.

Acting President Iliana Yotova — who would become Bulgaria's first elected female president if she wins — faces opposition candidate and former interim Prime Minister Andrey Gyurov.

Yotova beat Gyurov by a narrow margin of 2.8 percentage points in the first round of voting on Oct. 25, which drew **record low turnout** — only 23% of eligible voters cast a ballot, according to election officials.

Polls opened at 7 a.m. for another highly polarized contest in which the candidates will be trying to attract voters with contrasting political visions.

The first exit poll results are expected after polls close at 8 p.m., with official results to be announced Monday.

Bulgarians are voting against a backdrop of growing economic hardship and increased drone attacks on Black Sea shipping, which have left several sailors dead or missing.

Yotova is running as an independent. As vice president, she automatically became acting president earlier this year when the former head of state, Rumen Radev, resigned to lead his party to victory in the **general election**.

The vote is the first major test for Prime Minister Radev's Moscow-friendly Progressive Bulgaria party, which has endorsed Yotova.

Yotova is expected to continue Radev's policy of keeping Bulgaria on its European path, while also supporting better relations with Russia and the lifting of sanctions.

Both Yotova and Radev have called for a diplomatic solution to end the war in Ukraine but remain evasive about possible Russian involvement in drone attacks in the Black Sea region.

During a TV debate between the two

presidential contenders this week, Yotova advocated a settlement involving both Ukraine and Russia, saying that "peace could come only through negotiations."

She also proposed a security meeting involving all six Black Sea countries to sign a moratorium on hostilities.

Concentration of power

Observers say that a victory for Yotova would keep the presidency in the hands of the ruling majority.

Such a concentration of power could prevent the effective maintenance of checks and balances on policy decisions by institutions, they say.

Yotova's challenger is economist Gyurov, a former deputy governor of the central bank and caretaker prime minister who led the country in early 2026. He is backed by the pro-Western, reformist opposition.

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Gyurov has often expressed firm support for Ukraine and signed a security cooperation agreement with Kyiv during his premiership.

Gyurov said he wants Bulgaria to be a reliable NATO ally able to stand for up its interests with strong diplomacy and a firm position.

Gyurov criticized the government for being reluctant to name Russia as the aggressor in the Russia-Ukraine war.

He called for identifying the threat and for Bulgarian participation in EU decisions from the outset.

"When you have no position and are not at the table, you are in fact on the menu," he said.