

On Political Arrests, Politically Motivated Persecutions and the Erosion of Rule of Law in Bulgaria

The Congress of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) Party convening in Brussels on 24-25 October 2025:

Notes that:

- Bulgaria is a member of the EU for almost 20 years but is suffering a backsliding in terms of democracy, rule of law and media freedom;
- the perception of judicial independence and of corruption in Bulgaria are among the lowest in the EU;
- there has been an alarming pattern in recent months of political interference in judicial matters, increasing use of prosecutorial power to target opposition figures, and legislative efforts that risk eroding democratic checks and balances;
- members of the democratic opposition, in particular leaders and elected members of ALDE member party We Continue the Change (Продължаваме промяната) are facing investigations, public disinformation campaigns, which follow a pattern of leaked evidence aimed at discrediting opponents and intimidating others into compliance;
- the most striking, but not only example, is the political arrest and continuing detention of the Mayor of Varna Blagomir Kotsev and two municipal counsellors, which bears all signs of a politically motivated attack aimed at limiting their participation in public life;
- the circumstances around the arrest of Kotsev raise reasonable suspicions of a violation of fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria and by international standards for the protection of human rights;
- conformity of the entire proceedings with both procedural and substantive rules is highly questionable;
- the political arrest of Kotsev sparked mass protests in both Varna and Sofia, emphasizing the disagreement of Bulgarian society with the use of the law enforcement authorities to attack the democratic opposition and with the replacement of the democratic vote of Bulgarian voters;
- any member state drifting away from the core values of the European Union endangers the fundamental rights of European citizens;
- each EU member state has contractually bound itself to comply with the European values of the Enlightenment, such as freedom, democracy, rule of law (characterised by the independent judiciary), human rights and open societies according to Article 2 TEU, and accepted a Union supervision for this;
- if left unaddressed, Bulgaria's current democratic situation can become a model for how institutions can be aimed at preservation of elite control while eluding both public scrutiny and international consequences.

Believes that:

- the rule of law is an essential component of a democratic state, and it ensures a safeguard against tyranny and selective justice;
- demonstrating a solid track record of investigations, prosecutions and final convictions in high-level

corruption, as called for by the 2025 Rule of Law, can never be achieved through politically motivated attacks targeted at the democratic opposition.

- the erosion of rule of law will affect foreign investment, economic stability, and Bulgaria's access to EU funds, as rule of law violations can lead to the freezing of EU financial support.

Welcomes:

- the immediate reaction of the ALDE Party, Renew Europe Parliamentary Group, Renew Europe in the European Committee of the Regions and the European Liberal Forum;
- the reaction of Bulgarian society, which gave a clear negative assessment of the political attack against representatives of the opposition.

Calls for:

- the release of the Varna Mayor Blagomir Kotsev and of all opposition representatives kept in detention, the dropping of any politically motivated charges and the strict adherence to the EU Rule of Law standards in any proceedings initiated against any person, regardless of political or any other status;
- the European Commission and European states to take a more active, critical approach in addressing the deteriorating rule of law standards in Bulgaria, especially in using and weaponising state authorities and the judiciary to threaten political opponents;
- calls upon the European Parliament to monitor the rule of law situation in Bulgaria on a regular basis in its LIBE and EUDS committees, including through its democracy, rule of law, and fundamental rights monitoring group, and to hold a debate in the plenary.
- ALDE member parties to raise the issue of unlawful political detentions in Bulgaria before their national parliaments, requesting hearings with foreign ministers and ambassadors to Bulgaria;
- The suspension of payments under the Bulgarian Recovery and Resilience Plan until all political prisoners are released;
- The organisation of an ALDE/Renew fact-finding mission to Bulgaria to assess the rule of law situation and report back to the Bureau.