

The Only English-Language Daily in Bulgaria

Sofia, Wednesday, June 30, 2021, No.150

Government Provides Lv 81 Mln for Hemus Motorway Construction

Sofia - The Council of Ministers decided to provide 81,157,840 leva in financial resources to the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works (MRDPW) to pay for this year's construction activities along the unfinished Hemus Motorway which will link the Bulgarian capital Sofia with the seaside city of Varna, the Government Information Service reported on Tuesday.

Nine sections of the motorway will continue to be built as planned. The funding for the construction of the road until 2024 will be secured from the state budget.

The news comes after the MRDPW froze the bank accounts of state-owned road construction and repair company Avtomagistrali on June 10. The company warned that the move will have grave consequences for the implementation of motorway construction and repair contracts. The freeze followed a National Audit Office probe which found irregularities at Avtomagistrali. It revealed that the company had been awarded public procurement contracts which were beyond its capacity. Another malpractice has been the making of unwarranted advance payments for planned work on the Hemus Motorway.

In its press release on Tuesday, the MRDPW also said it will refund 490,779,500 leva to the state budget. The money will be used to finance priority activities to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The government decisions were made remotely. □

COVID-19 Update: 115 New Cases, Test Positivity Rate at 0.57%

Sofia - The number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in Bulgaria reached 421,646, after 20,035 tests identified 115 new infections on Monday, according to data posted on <https://coronavirus.bg/> on Tuesday. The test positivity rate now stands at 0.57 per cent. Sofia tops the list of new cases with 34 positive tests, followed by Blagoevgrad with 11 cases and Sofia region with 10 cases.

The active cases are 9,364. There are 1,517 hospitalized COVID-19 patients, of whom 186 in intensive care.

The infected medical staff have reached 13,440.

Another 117 COVID-19 patients have recovered over the last 24 hours, bringing the total to 394,242.

Thirteen fatalities were reported, and the death toll now adds up to 18,040. With 8,102 new inoculations over the last 24 hours, 1,735,675 persons in aggregate have received a coronavirus vaccination so far, including 790,971 who are fully vaccinated. □

Foreign Minister Stoev Confers with Cardinal Semeraro of the Vatican

Sofia - Foreign Minister Svetlan Stoev received Tuesday Cardinal Marcello Semeraro of the Vatican to discuss with him bilateral relations and their activation in recent years, the Foreign Ministry said.

Stoev welcomed the Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints to Bulgaria, underscoring the shared values based on faith, humanism, justice and mercy. He expressed satisfaction with the level of dialogue between the Vatican and Bulgaria, recalling the visit of President Rumen Radev on the occasion of May 24 this year.



Caretaker Foreign Minister Svetlan Stoev and Cardinal Marcello Semeraro (left) *Foreign Ministry Photo*

Gratitude to the Vatican was also conveyed for the support to the Catholic community in Bulgaria over the years, as well as for the opportunity to celebrate a Bulgarian service at the Church of San Paolo alla Regola in Rome.

Cardinal Semeraro expressed gratitude for the hospitality, underscoring that it had also been appreciated highly by Pope Francis during his visit to Bulgaria in 2019. "The Bulgarian land is a crossroads of cultures and people, and Europe was born of the meeting between peoples," the cardinal said. □

INSIDE:

- *Prosecution Service and OSCE Discuss Upcoming Snap Elections 2*
- *WWF Report Forecasts New Jobs in Bulgaria Created by Just Transition 4*

Prosecution Service Officials Discuss with OSCE Representatives Upcoming Snap General Elections

Sofia - The Prosecutor General's deputies at the Supreme Prosecutor's Office of Cassation (SPOC), Plamena Tsvetanova and Daniela Masheva, and Prosecutor General Spokesperson Siyka Mileva had a working meeting here with representatives of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's (OSCE) mission in Bulgaria Eirini Skouzou, legal analyst, and Iлина Dyakova, senior legal analyst assistant, the prosecuting magistracy reported on Tuesday. The meeting was held in

connection with the upcoming early parliamentary elections on July 11.

Among the topics of discussion were the measures taken by the prosecuting magistracy to make sure the law is observed during the elections and crimes against citizens' political rights are countered.

The prosecution service officials familiarized the OSCE representatives with the probes and pre-trial proceedings against individuals and criminal organizations who were involved in vote-buying during the last general elections, held

on April 4 of this year.

The OSCE representatives were informed that the prosecuting magistracy has requested the distraint of 425,000 leva under legislation against money laundering, and that 383,000 leva and euro in different banknotes, which were to be used for vote-buying, have been seized.

The OSCE representatives were also told that SPOC has established a unit on duty for the July 11 elections to handle election violations alerts. □

New Director Appointed at National Institute for Immovable Cultural Heritage

Sofia - A new director has been appointed at the National Institute for Immovable Cultural Heritage. Architect Peter Petrov was presented to specialists and the news media at a briefing Tuesday by Culture Minister Velislav Minekov.

Minekov said that a new leaf is being turned with regard to the Institute: it will get new offices, possibly in central Sofia, and permanent space will be provided for its huge archive.

The new director said the Institute would live up to the public's expectations regarding the pressing issues it faces, including adequate measures related to the preservation of cultural heritage and revisions to the Cultural Heritage Act.

The Institute supports the Culture Ministry in its work for protecting immovable cultural heritage; prepares evaluations and proposals for registration of buildings and others as immovable cultural heritage; proposes special protection measures; documents cultural immovables and digitizes the available information for them; and keeps a national register of cultural immovables. It also carries out research work, traces and studies cultural immovables and provides post-graduate training in the area of protecting the architectural heritage. □

Two Top Officials of BDZ State Railways Dismissed over BDZ's Worsening Performance

Sofia - Caretaker Transport, IT and Communications Minister Georgi Todorov has relieved of their posts the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Bulgarian State Railways (BDZ), Grigori Grigorov, and Nikola Vassilev, Executive Director of BDZ Holding, the BDZ Holding said in a press release on Tuesday. The reason for the dismissal of the two is the worsening performance of the company in 2021 compared to 2020.

From the start of the year to date, passenger train delays amounted to a total of 71,333 minutes, by 4,710 trains. Furthermore, the poor state of the rolling stock and the poor organization of rail cargo services have caused a decline in customers, the press release says.

The BDZ passenger division has been experiencing a shortage of rolling stock in proper working order for years now, while the implementation of programmes for train repair and modernization of engines has been delayed. Yet another problem is that an order for 15 Siemens Smartron electric train engines for BDZ has been found to deviate from the European requirements for interoperability and from the national plan for implementation of the European Rail Traffic Management System (ERTMS), the EU-wide signalling and speed control system.

More irregularities have been identified in public procurements for repair of train carriages and train security.

Another major problem is the poor hygiene of passenger trains, the Ministry said.

The cargo division of the BDZ has lost major customers, and has unpaid debts for infrastructure fees and electricity. Also, repair works programmes have not been implemented. □



Tuesday, Coat of Arms Hall. President Rumen Radev hands the national flag to the Bulgarian Olympic delegation that will represent this country in Tokyo. The delegation will consist of about 70 members, according to Bulgarian Olympic Committee President Stefka Kostadinova
BTA Photo

Deputy PM Pekanov: Sofia's EU Funding to Be Reduced without Threatening Metro's Future Construction

Sofia - Caretaker Deputy Prime Minister for EU Funds Management Atanas Pekanov conferred here on Tuesday at the Council of Ministers with Sofia Mayor Yordanka Fandakova and her team to discuss the problems with distribution of EU funds across the country, which directly impacts its development, Pekanov's press centre reported.

"I am once again adamantly stating that the logic behind my position on the [EU] funding for the capital city is purely economic. Five of this country's six regions are among the poorest in all of Europe. Sofia Region is not among them, but continues to get disproportionately higher portion of the funding, which will be reduced," Pekanov is quoted as saying.

Pekanov and his team of experts noted that keeping Sofia in the Yugozapaden [Southwest] Planning Region is a serious mistake in view of this country's general strategy. The majority of EU capitals are separated into their own economic regions, and only Bulgaria does not follow this approach with the goal of guaranteeing more funding specifically for its capital.

According to Pekanov, no sustainable model for financing infrastructure projects has been established in Sofia, meaning that the city has been getting, to a certain extent, "a free lunch". The European institutions have been saying for years that this must end and the EU funding should be directed towards cohesion, and not prioritized for the only region in Bulgaria that is doing somewhat better. Therefore, Sofia must find better and sustainable models of financing, largely with its own revenue.

"We have never questioned the Sofia Metro's importance as a leading project. Despite being convinced that this is not the most correct mechanism of financing important infrastructure projects, we have never threatened the Metro. However, there must and will be a reduction of the funding for the capital," Pekanov said, adding that this reduction is estimated to be around 200 million leva. The right thing would be for this money to go towards education and health care of all Bulgarians, instead of separate projects in the capital, he said.

Sofia Mayor Fandakova said on Facebook after her meeting with Pekanov and caretaker PM Stefan Yanev that five per cent of the funds included in the national Recovery and Resilience Plan have been designated for specific projects in Sofia. According to the Deputy PM for EU Funds Management, this is a huge concentration of funds that must be reduced, she said. Over 1.5 million citizens stand behind "this concentration of five per cent". These people are responsible for 40 per cent of all tax revenue generated in the Exchequer. That is why Fandakova disagrees with Pekanov's statements for the media that Sofia takes up huge financial resources and its funding under the national Recovery and Resilience Plan must be reduced.

That is the reason Fandakova has asked for an urgent meeting with caretaker PM Yanev. "We met with his team today to discuss the financing of the two extensions of the Metro's third line with funds from the Recovery and Resilience Plan," she said, adding that she was assured by Yanev that the projects for the two extensions will remain in the Recovery and Resilience Plan. The funding will likely be reduced "a little". "At this point, it is hard for me to say what is "a little" and what is "a lot" for the team responsible for drafting the plan" the Sofia Mayor's Facebook post reads.

The Dutch Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce announced Tuesday its official re-launch. The organization has existed for 20 years but had a halt in its operation several years ago. The re-launch event in a rooftop bar in central Sofia was opened by Ambassador Bea Ten Tusscher, who shared the excitement of the member companies. Among the participants in the event were representatives of Heineken, Shell, Strypes, Jan De Rijk, JDE and Phillips, as well as of many small and mid-sized companies. In 2020, the net investments from the Netherlands in Bulgaria totalled 393.9 million euro. By the end of 2020, the amount of foreign direct investment by the Netherlands in Bulgaria amounted to 7081.7 million euro, making the Netherlands the leading country of origin of FDI.

Photo by Dutch Bulgarian Chamber



WWF Report Forecasts New Jobs in Bulgaria Created by Just Transition

Sofia - Attitudes towards existing natural and economic resources must change completely in order to carry out a successful just transition from carbon dependency toward a carbon-neutral future, according to a report by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) on the new jobs in Bulgaria in the context of the transition toward a modern economy in line with the European Green Deal, the conservation organisation reported on Tuesday.

The report on Bulgaria was prepared by Georgi Stefanov of WWF-Bulgaria and a team of consultants, led by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Kosyo Stoychev of Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski.

According to the analysis, the regions with coal-fired economies, such as Pernik and Bobov Dol, can make progress in the context of the transition if they start using the existing natural and economic resources (people, land, real estate, forests, waters, energy potential) in new ways.

The report points out that the coal municipalities of Pernik and Bobov Dol are at a turning point in their economic and social development. Meanwhile, the transition to alternative economic activities in Stara Zagora is expected to affect many people and Bulgaria's major electricity producers, and these two challenges require preemptive measures.

According to the WWF report, the closure of coal-fuelled electricity generation will result in significant redundancy numbers. This will also affect all the sub-suppliers, as well as the tax revenues in the respective regions, the social security and health insurance systems in Bulgaria. This is the most serious social challenge and will further contribute to the additional supply on the labour market, of workers with secondary education, who are often unable to find jobs at similar remuneration rates in other sectors in the same

region, or start a business of their own. Therefore, they fall in the group at the highest risk of emigration and further impairment of the demographic situation.

The author points out that ensuring a just transition to a clean, circular economy in line with the European Green Deal is key to countering any possible adverse effects of the phasing out of coal. Investing in education, qualification and requalification is part of the solution with alternative employment for those employed in the affected sectors. This process will only show its benefits after at least three years.

The report also says that special attention should be paid to the development of skills and entrepreneurship in the following sectors: renewable energy, organic agriculture and organic foods, bioplastics, IT, resource efficiency, circular economy, design. All of these economic processes should be planned before the mines are closed in order to achieve a successful economic transformation in the coal regions.

The expected number of new jobs in micro enterprises is estimated at 150 for the Bobov Dol municipality, 700 for Pernik and over 2,000 for Stara Zagora, and these can also be created through individual startups. All other workers must be reallocated to existing companies or newly-established small and medium-sized enterprises. According to the analysis, about 15,000 people in aggregate are employed in mining and electricity production on the territories of Pernik, Bobov Dol and Stara Zagora.

According to Stefanov, territorial plans for just transition are being developed. These will be based on activities to be incorporated in training for acquiring knowledge and skills, demanded on the labour market, and related to the successful practicing of professions, newly occurring green jobs or transformed jobs. □

Slightly over 27% of Accommodation Places Made Use of Employer Support Measures in May

Sofia - In May, 54.3 per cent of the polled managers of accommodation establishments offered their clients an alternative period to use their reservations; 63.2 per cent intended to reduce the price of the package services; and 46.7 per cent wanted to reduce the price of overnights, the National Statistical Institute said.

With regard to employees, 9.7 per cent of the managers resorted to unpaid leave or layoffs, followed by paid leave (9.0 per cent), part-

time work (6.0 per cent), wage cuts (3.9 per cent) and remote work (2.2 per cent). At the same time, 27.1 per cent of the accommodation establishments benefited from the government's employer support measures.

In May, 50.9 per cent of respondents said the revenues from their activity were unchanged from April, while 31.8 per cent reported an increase.

Asked about the next month, 44.6 per cent of the managers said they expected to be able to self-

finance "up to 50 per cent" of their operating costs, 35.8 per cent said they would succeed "up to 100 per cent", and 19.4 per cent of respondents said they would not be able to cope on their own.

Regarding their future activity in the short term, 62.3 per cent of the managers are planning to continue their current business, 27.6 per cent say they will reduce the scope of their activity, 5.5 per cent expect to suspend operations, and 2.9 per cent are planning to cease operation. □

Access of Information Programme Releases Annual Report

Sofia - As few as 42 institutions out of 525 have content compliant with the law in their Access to Information sections, according to the Access to Information Programme. It resented its annual report on the state of access to information in Bulgaria at a video conference on Tuesday.

A 2021 survey shows that 525 of the 563 institutions maintain an Access to Information section. Compared with 2020, their number increased by 27 and reached 93 per cent of all studied websites.

In the majority of cases members of the public sought information from the local authorities, from ministries, state agencies and commissions, show data based on the legal aid provided by the Programme.

In 2020, tacit refusals accounted for the largest share of refusals followed by refusals on the grounds that the requested information is preparatory or involves negotiations and refusals on the grounds that the requested

information is not public.

Lawyer Alexander Kashumov, who heads the Programme's legal team, said that the European Union is moving towards data opening. He noted that administrative capacity in Bulgaria needs to improve and that training should be held with regards to the right to information.

The report makes a number of recommendations in connection with access to information. In the judiciary, the Judges Chamber of the Supreme Judicial Council, and the presidents of the Supreme Court of Cassation, appeals, district and regional courts should take steps to publish the verbatim reports of open court proceedings.

Parliament is urged to take steps and ensure genuine transparency of the legislation process. Another recommendation is for the government to take steps to accede the Council of Europe Convention on Access to Official Documents.

On the right to access information, the report recommends en-

suring a precise balance between the right of access to public information and the right to personal data protection in handling of access to information requests by the authorities.

The Programme urges institutions to publish along with principal documents the main budget papers in a non-technical language using visualizations.

The Programme has published an Active Transparency Rating for 2021 done between March 1 and April 29 by auditing the websites of 563 institutions. It acknowledges an increase in the consistent publications of legislation, draft legislation and accompanying motives, preliminary impact assessments, reports from public consultations, general administrative acts and notifications for opening of proceedings for their issuance. There are more publications of strategies, programmes, development plans and reports and publications in connection with financial transparency and public procurement. □

Shipping Picks Up along Danube after Big Pandemic Wave

Rousse, on the Danube - Shipping along the Danube is picking up after a big pandemic wave, Valentin Hristov, head of the Danube River Shipping Directorate in Rousse, said on June 29 marked as the World Danube Day. He said business is picking up as well in cargo and logistics companies.

The first two cruise ships for this year paid a port call in Rousse several days ago and Hristov said port calls are expected to increase as the summer advances.

"More and more ships are sailing along the Danube," Hristov said. The waterway in the Bulgarian stretch of the river has improved after the dredging works done by the Executive Agency for Exploration and Maintenance of the River Danube. There are no problems with the navigation now.

Hristov said that the pandemic and the restrictions it brought last year reduced by 10-15 per cent the calls by cargo ships at the Bulgarian ports along the Danube while there was no cruise season to speak of.

The World Danube Day was marked in Rousse with an event organized by the State Port Infrastructure Enterprise and held in front of the Centre for River Information Services which also is the hub for river traffic control along the entire Bulgarian section of the Danube. The winners of a children's poetic competition entitled "The Danube and Rousse in My Soul" received their awards at a special ceremony.

The Danube River Protection Convention, which forms the overall legal instrument for co-operation on transboundary water management in the Danube River Basin, was signed on June 29, 1994 in Sofia. □



Tourism Minister Stela Baltova met with tour operators of the Future for Tourism Association who staged a protest, claiming they were owed about 16 million leva in State aid that would offset their pandemic losses. The Tourism Ministry will publish guidelines on the application for State aid, Baltova said. Pictured: Baltova and Association Chair Pavlina Ilieva (right) BTA Photo

Football: Owner of PFC Levski Calls Off Talks with Potential Club Buyer

Sofia - Nasko Sirakov, the majority owner of PFC Levski, said here on Tuesday that he is calling off the talks with potential buyer Joseph Dixon about transferring the control stock of shares. In a statement published on Levski's website, Sirakov admits that at the club's feast day on May 24, he "committed a grave error blinded by emotions and misled the club's supporters about the expected transfer, much in the same way as he himself had been misled".

In Sirakov's words, the talks are called off due to "considerable discrepancies between the commitments to investments and the ensuing steps" which gave him reason to believe that "Dixon is not the investor Levski needs". "I did not receive convincing guarantees about the amount of investments or their provenance," Sirakov said. The investments were expected to go the club and to its home ground, the Vivacom Arena Georgi Asparuhov stadium.

Sirakov further pledged readiness to make public all communications and documents exchanged between the club and Dixon so as "to leave no room for speculations and interpretations".

Sirakov says that he is sparing no effort to find ways to stabilize the club.

The cash-strapped Levski risks losing its players as their contracts expire later in the summer unless somebody invests in the club.

Sirakov's statement comes a day after Dixon said he was calling off the deal unless Sirakov approves the draft agreement by June 30.

Earlier in June, Dixon pledged to invest 250 million dollars in Levski, most of it going towards a brand new stadium and a mall on the site of the old stadium. Dixon also said that Sirakov would keep his position as the club's President. Dixon's idea was that the club should become self-sustaining in the future, regardless of who owns it. □

EBRD Expects Bulgaria's Economy to Grow by 4.5% in 2021

London - Bulgaria's economy is expected to grow 4.5 per cent in 2021 and 4 per cent in 2022 after a 4.2 per cent decline last year, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) says in its latest Regional Economic Prospects report, published on Tuesday. The forecast for Bulgaria was revised up 1.5 percentage points since September 2020. The Bulgarian economy is expected to grow by 0.2 per cent in the period between 2019 and the end of 2021.

The EBRD says that with growth

of 4.2 per cent in 2021, the recovery of the emerging economies in Eastern Europe, Central Asia and North Africa is gathering pace following the COVID-19 pandemic. "This is an upward revision for 2021 from the 3.6 per cent the Bank forecast for the year in its previous report in September 2020. For 2022, the EBRD expects further solid expansion with 3.9 per cent growth," the report says.

"The contraction in output in 2020 was also milder than previously forecast (2.3 per cent rather than 3.9 per

cent) following improvements in the overall economic environment late last year due to strong exports and fiscal support," the EBRD says.

EBRD Chief Economist Beata Javorcik said: "Although the revised forecasts give reasons to be optimistic, huge uncertainty remains with regards to the path of the COVID-19 Delta variant which poses particularly large risks for countries that have made less progress on vaccinations and for economies highly reliant on international tourism." □

Bulgarian Navy Corvette Bodri to Participate in Sea Breeze 2021 International Military Exercise

Sofia - The Bulgarian Navy corvette Bodri will take part in the Sea Breeze 2021 international exercise from June 30 to July 6, the Defence Ministry said Tuesday.

The drills, led by the US and Ukraine, will take place in Ukraine's territorial waters in the Black Sea.

The exercise will drill navigation control tasks, countering enemies in the air, underwater and on water, rendering aid to a vessel in distress, refuelling at sea, and group escort of a vessel carrying precious cargo.

The exercise is expected to improve the Bodri crew's interoperability and tactical operability while working in a multinational environment, the Defence Ministry said. □



Vice President Iliana Iotova talked with representatives of Bulgarian schools in France. Iotova is in the French capital for the opening of the Paris session of the Generation Equality Forum, a global gathering for gender equality convened by UN Women and co-hosted by the governments of Mexico and France

Photo: the President's Administration

How the Death of Two Football Legends Unsettled the Bulgarian Communist Regime

Metodi Yordanov of BTA

Sofia

June 30 of this year marks the 50th death anniversary of two of Bulgaria's all-time greatest football players - Georgi (Gundi) Asparuhov and Nikola (The Kitten) Kotkov, both playing for PFC Levski at the time. Hundreds of thousands of fans attended their funeral, which left the communist regime at the time unsettled and caught off-guard.



Archive photo of Georgi "Gundi" Asparuhov, dated January 10, 1966 **BTA Photo**

The two football legends died in a tragic fiery car crash on this day 50 years ago on their way from Sofia to the north-western city of Vratsa, where they were invited to play in a football match hosted by the local Botev Vratsa football team on the occasion of its 50th anniversary.

The two never made it to the game. Enchanted by the invitation to play and pay their respects to the local team, Gundi and Kotkov got into the former's Alpha Romeo car and headed towards Vratsa. A stranger at a gas station on the way asked them for a ride and hopped into the doomed Italian vehicle. The three continued to their destination, where Gundi and Kotkov would not live to play their football match. Driving along the curvy mountainous road, they came across a truck with a trailer that

cut them off right after a sharp turn. The crash was almost instant. The car rammed into the truck's gas tank, which ignited and incinerated the vehicle and its occupants before anyone could come to their rescue. Asparuhov had managed to step on the brakes, leaving 30-meters long skid marks.

At the time, Gundi had managed to get the attention of some of the top European football clubs. He was wanted by Benfica, as well as Italy's AC Milan. AC Milan's emissary quoted Asparuhov's response to their offer: "Tell them that there is a country named Bulgaria. In that country there is a team named Levski, you might not have heard of it. But I was born in this team and I will die in this team." The communist regime was not very enthused about such a transfer either.

The two football legends' funeral was attended by 150,000 mourners (some sources put this figure as high as 500,000) which was more than the number of attendees of any organized event by the communist government, such as dictator Georgi Dimitrov's funeral. To make matters worse, the two beloved Bulgarian players' demise coincided with the tragic death of three Soviet astronauts from the Soyuz 11 mission, which the Bulgarian government spared no effort publicizing, even staging a symbolic funeral. The huge attendance of Gundi and Kotkov's funeral left the communist regime wobbling and the authorities went as far as to oust the then Interior Minister, Angel Solakov, who went to the two footballers' funeral, instead of the Soviet astronauts'.

Georgi Asparuhov was declared posthumously Bulgaria's best football player of the 20th century. In 2014, by a presidential decree, he was presented with the Order of Stara Planina, Bulgaria's highest state honor, for his exceptional contribution to sports. □

Business Climate Worsens in Industry, Construction in June

Sofia - In June, the total business climate indicator dropped by 4.0 percentage points from May, with lower indicators registered in industry and construction, the National Statistical Institute said on Tuesday.

The composite indicator "business climate in industry" lost 8.4 percentage points due to the industrial entrepreneurs' less favourable assessments and expectations for the business situation. The most serious problem for business development in the sector remains the uncertain economic environment, followed by slack domestic demand.

The composite indicator "business climate in construction" fell by 6.5 percentage points, reflecting the construction entrepreneurs' more reserved assessments of the current business situation of the enterprises. However, they make favourable forecasts for both the business situation of the enterprises over the next six months and construction activity over the next three months.

In June, the composite indicator "business climate in the retail trade" was more or less unchanged from its May level. The retailers' forecasts for business development over the

next six months are unfavourable, while their expectations for the volume of sales over the next three months are reserved. The uncertain economic environment remains the main obstacle, although its negative impact decreased in the past month.

The composite indicator "business climate in the service sector" rose by 2.7 percentage points on the back of the managers' positive assessments of the current business situation of the enterprises. As before, the uncertain economic environment and competition are the main difficulties reported by the enterprises. □

Romania Commemorates Victims of Iasi Pogrom

Bucharest - The Romanian Parliament held a ceremony on Tuesday to commemorate the victims of the Pogrom of Iasi which was committed 80 years ago during World War II. On the evening of June 28, 1941, Romanian and German soldiers, members of the Romanian Special Intelligence Service, police and masses of residents murdered and plundered the Jews of Iasi, Northeastern Romania. Thousands were killed in their homes and in the streets, and thousands more were arrested. Approximately 4,000 Jews, rounded up from all parts of town, were packed onto so-called "death trains" which were sealed and moved back and forth between railway stations; 2,650 of them died of suffocation or thirst, and others lost their sanity, according to the Yad Vashem World Holocaust Remembrance Centre.

In an anniversary message, Romanian President Klaus Iohannis said such atrocities become possible when the authorities that are supposed to protect the citizens turn into executioners at the orders of a criminal regime, Digi 24 television reported. The President warned that Holocaust denial, hate speech, attempts to distort history and anti-Semitism "are becoming increasingly common." Therefore, "we must defend our values, democratic principles, the rule of law. Education must remain at the heart of this ongoing struggle to counter these toxic currents." Iohannis noted that the Pogrom of Iasi is not just a tragedy of the Jews in that city; it is "a drama and a responsibility our society has been facing ever since." □

Albania to Buy Turkish Armed Drones

Ankara - Albania has joined a group of countries which will purchase Turkish armed drones, TRT Haber reported. The Albanian Parliament has approved an additional budget of 8.2 million euro for the purchase of Turkish unmanned aerial vehicles. The news comes after Albanian Internal Affairs Minister Bledar Cuci and military representatives of the country visited Turkey. Touring a plant of the Bayraktar company in Istanbul, which makes the drones, Cuci said Albania is considering the possibility of buying Turkish drones for military and civilian uses. □

Turkey's January-May Trade with Uzbekistan Almost Doubles

Ankara - Turkey's trade with Uzbekistan grew by 93 per cent in the first five months of 2021 compared with a year earlier, Turkish Vice President Fuat Oktay said during a visit to Uzbekistan, as quoted by Hurriyet Daily News. Oktay noted that the increase was achieved despite the coronavirus pandemic. He was speaking at a business forum held on the sidelines of a meeting of the Turkey-Uzbekistan Economic Commission. □

Turkey Starts Transferring Liquefied Natural Gas to Its First Publicly-owned Floating LNG Vessel

Ankara - Turkey started transferring liquefied natural gas (LNG) to its first publicly-owned floating LNG vessel which was inaugurated by the country's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan a few days ago, state-owned television TRT Haber reported. LNG from Algeria is being transferred to the Turkish vessel from a Bahamas-flagged ship. The transfer will be completed on July 2, by which time the floating vessel Ertugrul Gazi will have received 132,000 cubic metres of LNG. The vessel will convert this into 85 million cubic metres of natural gas, TRT Haber said. Turkey's first publicly-owned floating LNG vessel is in the Mediterranean Sea off the country's southernmost Hatay Province. It is 295 metres long, 46 metres wide and 63 metres tall. It was built in South Korea. The vessel can regasify up to 28 million cubic metres of gas per day, one of the largest capacities in the world. Ertugrul Gazi is owned by Turkish state-owned oil and gas company BOTAS. □

Slovenia Will Continue Efforts for Start of Talks with Skopje and Tirana, Does Not Expect Consent for Schengen Enlargement

BTA correspondent Nikolay Jeliaskov

Brussels

Iztok Jarc, Slovenia's Permanent Representative to the EU, said on Tuesday that Slovenia, which takes up the rotating EU Council Presidency from July 1, will continue the efforts for the start of accession talks with Skopje and Tirana. Jarc said the proposal of the Portuguese EU Presidency for a way out of the dispute between Sofia and Skopje is a good foundation for reaching a solution. According to him, Ljubljana can be expected to make a proposal in September which will receive general support.

Slovenia will work with the desire to launch the negotiations with Skopje and Tirana by the end of the year, said the Ambassador, expressing hope that Bulgaria will be able to form a regular government after the upcoming early elections.

Ambassador Jarc added that political talks at the EU Council will determine whether it is possible to enlarge Schengen to Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia, as the European Commission has recommended recently. He said that by the end of the Slovenian EU Presidency most of the talks will be in person. □

Exchange Rates

Sofia - The Bulgarian National Bank sets the rates of foreign currencies against the Bulgarian lev applicable from 5 p.m. on June 29 to 5 p.m. on June 30, 2021. The central rates are used for the purposes of accounting, statistics, customs valuation and remittances. The commercial banks set the exchange rates at which foreign exchange is bought and sold.

June 29 - June 30, 2021			
CURRENCY	ISO CODE	FOR	LEVA
AUSTRALIAN DOLLAR	AUD	1	1.23701
BRAZILIAN REAL	BRL	10	3.32477
CANADIAN DOLLAR	CAD	1	1.32995
SWISS FRANC	CHF	1	1.7837
CHINESE YUAN RENMINBI	CNY	10	2.54619
CZECH KORUNA	CZK	100	7.67685
DANISH KRONE	DKK	10	2.63011
BRITISH POUND	GBP	1	2.2756
HONG KONG DOLLAR	HKD	10	2.11906
CROATIAN KUNA	HRK	10	2.60916
HUNGARIAN FORINT	HUF	1,000	5.57042
INDONESIAN RUPIAH	IDR	10,000	1.12793
NEW ISRAELI SHEKEL	ILS	10	5.046
INDIAN RUPEE	INR	100	2.21486
ICELANDIC KRONA	ISK	100	1.32779
JAPANESE YEN	JPY	100	1.48687
SOUTH KOREAN WON	KRW	1,000	1.45821
MEXICAN PESO	MXN	10	8.28362
MALAYSIAN RINGGIT	MYR	1	3.96294
NORWEGIAN KRONE	NOK	10	1.91949
NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	NZD	1	1.15049
PHILIPPINE PESO	PHP	100	3.38584
POLISH ZLOTY	PLN	10	4.32773
NEW ROMANIAN LEU	RON	10	3.96921
RUSSIAN ROUBLE	RUB	100	2.26196
SWEDISH KRONA	SEK	10	1.92674
SINGAPOREAN DOLLAR	SGD	10	1.22354
THAI BAHT	THB	100	5.12453
NEW TURKISH LIRA	TRY	10	1.88768
US DOLLAR	USD	1	1.64521
SOUTH AFRICAN RAND	ZAR	10	1.14698
GOLD	XAU	1 troy ounce	2888.84

**Today's Observances:
June 30**

The world:

- National Day of Sudan. Revolution Day;
- National Day of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Independence Day (1960).

On this date in Bulgarian history:

1921: Education until the age of 14 is made compulsory by a National Education Act.

1957: The first hotel in the Golden Sands resort, the Rodina, opens.

1966: Diplomatic relations established with Canada.

1971: Football stars Georgi "Gundi" Asparouhov and Nikola Kotkov are killed in a car crash.

1994: Education, Science, Culture Foundation is established. It works with children in the sphere of science, culture and art.

2007: Opening of the Sun Village settlement near Byala, built with 3 million euro of Dutch investments.

2008: Association of Credit Consultants in Bulgaria is established. □

Weather Forecast

June 30: Sunny. Cumulus cloud with rain and thunder after noon over the western parts, mainly in the mountains. Mild to moderate southeasterly wind. Highs: 34C to 39C.

Black Sea coast: Sunny. Visibility may be briefly low in the morning. Moderate southeasterly wind after noon. Highs: 26C to 31C. Seawater temperature: 26C to 31C.

Mountains: Sunny: Cumulus cloud with possible rain and thunder after noon in the western parts. Moderate easterly wind. Highs: around 28C at 1,200 m, around 21C at 2,000 m.

Source: National Institute of Meteorology and Hydrology. □

PUBLISHED BY:

Bulgarian News Agency (BTA) 49 Tsarigradsko Chaussee Blvd., Sofia, Bulgaria

EXTERNAL SERVICE DEPARTMENT:

HEAD: Nadezhda Filipova tel: (+359 2) 9262279; 9262205

BULGARIAN TEXT EDITORS:

Roumen Yanovski, Rositsa Ilieva, Nikolay Velev

Tel: (+359 2) 987 1633; 9262215

Fax: (+359 2) 981 4208/9862289; Tlx: 22821, 22586

E-mail: dnews@bta.bg

BTA guarantees the accuracy of quotations but accepts no liability for the accuracy of any statement contained therein. The responsibility for quoted opinions rests solely with the parties and/or sources quoted, and quotation does not imply an endorsement or acceptance of any such opinions by BTA. Unless otherwise expressly specified, all items in this daily are written, compiled and/or translated by BTA staff writers and correspondents and must be credited accordingly.

ENGLISH VERSION EDITORS:

Svetlozar Nikolov tel: (+359 2) 92 62205

Lyubomir Gigov tel: (+359 2) 92 62279

TRANSLATORS: Diana Doukowska, Bistra Roushkova, Zhechka Dimitrova, Valentin Evstatiev, Petya Petrova, Dimitrina Solakova, Metodi Yordanov, Desislava Toncheva, Matey Todorov

Tel: (+359 2) 9262279 (+359 2) 9262 242 ext. 279/378

COMPUTER DESIGN: Maria Kolarova