

Bulgarian News Agency

# DAILYNEWS

## MEDIA REVIEW



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### DIPLOMACY

Kenneth Merton, who has been nominated for United States ambassador to Bulgaria, was asked at a hearing in the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations to comment on Bulgaria's continuing relationship with Russian petroleum company Lukoil and the country's decision to continue to refine Russian fuel not only for domestic consumption, 24 Chasa reports. According to Senator Chris Van Hollen, Bulgaria's intention to export fuel derived from Russian oil violates EU regulations.

Merton said he will work with other EU governments to propose mechanisms which Bulgaria can use to shake off its dependence on Russian oil. He acknowledged the country's progress in energy diversification. Describing the completion of the Greece-Bulgaria natural gas interconnector as a great success, Merton noted that, as far as he knows, Bulgaria is not using natural gas from Russia anymore, "which is good". He praised Bulgaria for its dedication to NATO ever since its accession to the alliance in 2004. Russia's war against Ukraine makes Washington's coordination with Sofia more important than ever before, he said. Merton noted that Bulgaria has received 145,000 refugees from Ukraine, has fully supported the EU sanctions against Moscow, and its Parliament has voted in favour of military assistance to Ukraine.

The Foreign Relations Committee hearing is also covered on MediaPool.bg, which carries a video of it.

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The Netherlands' position against Bulgaria's and Romania's accession to the Schengen border-free area, which is unfair, can trigger a counterreaction from the EU,

journalist and politician Elena Yoncheva writes in Trud. She refers to a comment she made for one of the leading Dutch newspapers, Algemeen Dagblad. In that comment, published on Wednesday, Yoncheva, who has been a member of the European Parliament since 2019, warns that the Netherlands risks missing the highest position in Frontex. "No political games should be played about that," she says.

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A Bulgarian diplomat earns as much as a supermarket cashier: BGN 1,600 per month on average, 24 Chasa says in its main story, covering what it calls "the first strike in the history of the Foreign Ministry". Due to the strike, consular services and certification procedures in Bulgaria will be halted on Friday and the Foreign Ministry head office in Sofia will suspend operation. The Bulgarian diplomatic and consular missions abroad are on standby, ready to join the effective strike if the authorities do not heed the employees' demands.

On Wednesday, 200 Foreign Ministry employees stood at the service entrance to the head office in Sofia throwing handfuls of small change to express discontent with the low pay they receive, the daily says. Foreign Ministry officers have to meet some of the most stringent occupational criteria in the public administration, but still, a young employee usually starts out with a monthly wage of BGN 1,000.

The daily goes on to note that computer specialists and political experts working in the United States Embassy in Bulgaria are paid BGN 3,866 per month for a 40-hour working week. This transpired from job advertisements published by the US mission some time ago. Ambassador Herro Mustafa's bodyguard earns a gross income of BGN 1,960. At present, the US Embassy is looking to hire a PR officer for a gross wage of BGN 2,125. The diplomats in

the Russian Embassy were left without wages in July due to EU sanctions against Russian money transfers to the bloc, which automatically prevented the transfer of USD 890,000 to the Embassy, the paper says.

Appearing on the morning talk show of Nova TV, National Assembly Foreign Policy Committee Chair and former foreign minister Ekaterina Zaharieva said wages in the Foreign Ministry system can be raised by 30%. Zaharieva said her GERB party will submit a query on the matter to caretaker Prime Minister Galab Donev.

## POLITICS

Bulgarian Socialist Party leader Kornelia Ninova called once more on the caretaker cabinet to propose a state budget for 2023 rather than let the National Assembly extend the application of the 2022 budget into 2023, which the legislature is apparently set to do after a November 29 first-reading vote in favour of an extension, Duma reports in its main story. If the old budget is extended, welfare payments will be frozen, Ninova protested. "This is no solution for the people and the economy. This is a trap set by President Rumen Radev," Ninova said.

The caretaker cabinet and the President will say again that the parties are bad and the MPs are even worse as they are unable to find a solution, she said. "Day after day, the public is being brainwashed into accepting the story about the good President, the bad parties and the absolutely incompetent Parliament," she said.

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Discussing the possible extension of the 2022 state budget in an interview for Trud, financier Lyubomir Datsov says every decision has its advantages and disadvantages. A budget extension would not be a viable solution because it could potentially plunge Bulgaria into political instability of the kind which was in place until 1996. This is so because the state budget is a policy-making instrument, Datsov reasons.

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After a month of arguing about whether the Lukoil Neftochim oil refinery in the Bulgarian seaside city of Burgas will go out of business if the export of products from Russian crude oil is banned, the National Assembly Energy Committee approved on first reading a bill sponsored by the Movement for Rights and Freedoms, which seeks to impose such a ban, MediaPool.bg reports. The bill is aimed to regulate a derogation granted by the European Commission to Bulgaria concerning the ban on

importing Russian crude oil as part of the sanctions against Russia over the war in Ukraine. Brussels has permitted Bulgaria to continue to use oil of the Urals brand until the end of 2024, but the regulation requires that the products derived from it should be used only on the domestic market, the website notes.

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The government conceals socially significant information with the instinct of a predator, although a special law has existed for 22 years telling the authorities how they should provide such information to the public, and why, lawyer Alexander Kashamov says in a video of the series "(Op-)position)", run by Segabg.com.

Kashamov says: "In this respect, the prosecution service is a unique institution. Throughout the years of application of the Access to Public Information Act, I have not seen such schizophrenic behaviour in any other institution. For certain cases we get all the information, complete with ID numbers, home addresses, witness testimony and what not. For other cases it turns out that even information about who the supervising prosecutor is and what stage the case is at, is a very big secret."

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Military Medical Academy (MMA) Director Ventsislav Mutafchiiski told the morning talk show of BNT1, the main channel of Bulgarian National Television, that the battle against COVID-19 has not been won. "It is definitely not over, although I would very much like to say it is," the general said, interviewed in connection with MMA's 131st anniversary. According to Mutafchiiski, Bulgaria should be prepared for new pandemics, because they are inevitable. At present, the country is last but one in Europe in terms of preparedness.

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Bulgarians are least satisfied with their life among the entire EU population, show data published by Eurostat and cited on page one in Trud. Bulgarian women aged over 16 years measure their satisfaction with life with 5.6 points on a scale of 0 to 10, and men with 5.8 points. These are the lowest levels among EU residents. Bulgaria has the highest share of smokers in the EU, but alcohol consumption in the country is temperate. At the same time, Bulgarians spend little time on exercise compared to other EU residents.